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HIS EXCELLENCY AND PETER

Theodore Acland Harper

EUROPE
SIBERIA
CHINA
INDIA
AFRICA
INDIAN OCEAN
PACIFIC OCEAN
THIS IS ALL TA
AMAZAR
THIS IS ALL TAIGA -
AND MANY HILLS
WHITE MOUNTAIN
WHERE THE FOREIGNER LIVED
CLOUDY PEAK
DAVENDA R.
SHILKA R.
GORBITZA R.
GORBITZA
PETER WAS BORN HERE
WHITE RIVER
KARA
OF EVIL MEMORY
STRETENSK
NERCHINSK
SHILKA RIVER
WHERE THE GOVERNOR WALKED THE FLOOR
CHITA
TO HARBIN
CHINESE EASTERN RAILWAY

THIS IS PARTLY FARMING LAND
AMUR R.
HIGH MOUNTAINS
ZEYA R.
AMUR R.
WHERE THE WILD HOONG HOOZA LIVE
MANCHURIA
BLAGOVESCHENSK
CARAVAN ROUTE TO HARBIN
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His Excellency and Peter

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HIS EXCELLENCY AND PETER

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The Janitor's Cat

Siberian Gold

Kubrik the Outlaw

Forgotten Gods

His Excellency and Peter

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PETER

HIS EXCELLENCY AND PETER

BY

THEODORE ACLAND HARPER

IN COLLABORATION WITH
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Child.
Coll.
J
HAR

Dedicated to a Boy
I Knew in the Taiga

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FIRST EDITION

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PART I

CHAPTER I

COLD TEA

HIS Excellency the Governor walked the floor. . . . It was a magnificent room for a promenade. High and long and bare of furniture, except for an immense table and three high-backed chairs grouped stiffly at the end farthest from the door. The center chair had the dimensions of a throne. There was one large portrait on the walls—an oil painting of His Imperial Majesty, Nicholas III, Tsar of all the Russias.

His Excellency the Governor walked the floor with a certain controlled impatience. He was a little man, white-haired, and tired-looking about the eyes, but for all its bare immensity the room did not dwarf him in the least for he carried himself as one used to command.

For twenty years he had been governor of a Siberian province, an aristocrat to the fingertips; head of the Shustof family, famous in history for its loyalty to its Tsars. As he walked the floor he was thinking dourly of his stewardship.

His jurisdiction, when he could enforce it, extended eastward from Lake Baikal fifteen hundred versts and merged vaguely into the Ussuri country toward the coast. To the south it ran along the Manchurian border, which —at least on the map—was clearly marked. To the north it disappeared frankly into the unknown.

And right through the center of this territory ran the great waterway of the Amur River. Its main tributary, the Shilka, flowed past Chita, the capital of the province, and on into the mountain country beyond Nerchinsk—a vast area of un-mapped taiga which had so effectually blocked the Tsar's engineers fifteen years ago, that the Siberian railroad had been turned south into Manchuria, and had thereby precipitated the Russo-Japanese War.

The aftermath of that conflict was still plaguing the Governor, for the Japanese, secure in the possession of Port Arthur and the Chinese Eastern Railroad, were defiantly plotting mischief; and his own province, especially the taiga country below Nerchinsk, was overrun with deserters from Russia's defeated armies sullenly waiting for another chance to revolt.

His Excellency stopped his promenade abruptly at the corner of the table and picked up an open letter. Apparently he had previously read it, for he did not glance at its contents, but stared past it at the samovar, which had long since ceased to boil.

"If one could persuade Petersburg to accept lower taxes . . . If one could insure two years of good crops . . . If one could replace the livestock that was commandeered during the war . . . If one could get rid of those noisy deserters and the still more pestilent gold thieves . . . If one's subordinates were not dishonest and lazy and afraid . . ."

The door at the other end of the room opened an inch and closed again without a sound.

The Governor resumed his steady pacing of the floor.

"If one knew what Tsing Feng was thinking about and where he was hiding himself at this time—but that we will not know until he chooses to declare himself. . . ."

Outside in the corridor a grizzled Cossack stood guard. Man and boy he had been personal body-servant to His Excellency for upward of fifty years, and though he had been born a serf and could not write his own name, he was the only man in the province who dared, when he chose, give unasked advice. And, on occasion, the Governor listened to him, for old Stenka was shrewd in his judgments of men.

He stood now with the absorbed attention of a fine old watchdog, listening to the footsteps which came and went with such steady persistence on the other side of the door.

At the far end of the corridor an ungainly figure appeared, padding toward him with flat-footed deliberateness, the while its owner buttoned his uniform over a stomach which preceded him.

Stenka's mustache bristled. Every morning at eleven Gregory Plotnikof, the Governor's secretary, came with papers to be signed, and every morning at eleven his eyes reminded Stenka of a weasel, just as his stomach reminded him of a pig; and every morning at eleven Stenka kept his opinion to himself, announcing him promptly in a voice which only faintly suggested these things.

But to-day, beyond folding his arms a little more rigidly, he did not move, and the Secretary came to a stand with his stomach actually touching the kinjal which the old Cossack carried at all times slung from his belt.

"Announce me!" he murmured. And then he, too, stood

listening to His Excellency's measured tread. "Long ago He should have finished his tea!"

He pronounced the word "He" as though it were a surname, and as he spoke his voice wheezed a little with a fat man's shortness of breath.

Stenka gazed through him into the void. "Twice already I have carried fresh tea, but it has grown cold in the glass."

Again the Secretary listened, pondering, then turned to the nearest window and looked out.

It was drizzling, a mixture of sleet and rain. The soiled aftermath of a Siberian winter made a dismal setting to a flagstaff standing in solitary grandeur in the center of a quadrangle, round three sides of which low buildings were strung out in monotonous, unbroken lines. On the fourth side, beyond an extensive parade ground, the roofs of the city of Chita massed themselves in all the untidy confusion of a frontier town. Beyond the city, the railroad yards stood out like a smudge on the flank of the open country through which the great waterway silently pursued its course toward the sea.

But Plotnikof the Secretary saw none of these things. With him it was cause for astute speculation when the old man on the other side of the closed door forgot to drink his tea . . . particularly this morning. . . .

For several years it had been his custom to censor His Excellency's mail. Unofficially of course. Even to read the address on the letters he dared not open pandered to a curiosity which was ingrown, and to an envy of all men who might be greater than himself. But, unhappily, last night he had drunk too much, and this morning he had

foolishly allowed his subordinate to sort the contents of the mailbag, under Stenka's distrustful eyes. To a clever secretary even a careless glance at the seal on a letter gave an inkling of what was in the wind, but his subordinate was a fool.

He combed his beard impatiently, fanwise, toward his ears. What Department of State was baiting the old man now, that he had allowed two glasses of tea to grow cold? Of a certainty, in such a case there had been something interesting in the mail.

He turned from the window. "Announce me!" he ordered.

Stenka's heels clicked. He opened the door just wide enough to slip through, and closed it, shutting the Secretary outside.

Inside the room the Governor stopped under the portrait of the Tsar. He was by no means pleased at the disturbance.

"Well?"

"His Highborn, the Secretary Plotnikof, brings the writing."

His Excellency grunted and turned toward the table at the other end of the room.

Stenka admitted the Secretary and closed the door again. Every morning at this hour he watched the fat man propel himself down the long room and place the morning's correspondence in front of the great one whom they both served. The routine was as familiar as the portrait on the wall: the Governor at the table, the Secretary standing diffidently at his elbow, waiting to blot the signature and remove each paper as soon as it

was read and signed. No smallest detail ever escaped the old Cossack, standing with his backbone rubbing against the handle of the door.

To-day there were fewer papers than usual, but His Excellency was preoccupied or, of a certainty, he would have removed the letter that lay open on the table. Stenka shrewdly suspected it to be that letter that had caused him to forget his tea.

The Secretary saw it, and glanced sideways at the Governor. Seeing that he was not observed, he leaned closer. The letter was stamped with the seal of the Minister of Ways and Communications, and a single sentence leaped at him from the body of the text. ". . . *extension of the Amur Railroad* . . ." Beyond that he did not read because Stenka coughed so violently that it reverberated through the stillness of the room, and made the Governor look up sharply.

"Be quiet!" he ordered. "And bring me fresh tea."

Stenka removed the samovar with a flourish that swept the open letter to the floor.

The Secretary moved impatiently. "Clumsy one—pick it up!"

The Cossack did so. He could not read, but when he was sufficiently interested he could photograph accurately anything he saw. He folded the letter. Certainly he would know that piece of paper again. He laid it under the shadow of His Excellency's elbow where it would be safe from prying eyes.

When he returned with the samovar the Secretary was already leaving the room. Stenka closed the door ever so gently behind him. His Excellency was still occupying the

immense throne-like chair, but when the glass of hot tea was placed conveniently at his elbow he looked up.

"Canst thou find Boris Evanovich?"

"Of a certainty, Excellency. Does he not sit with what patience he can command in the place where thy maps are made?"

The Governor unfolded the letter which Plotnikof had so greatly desired to read. "Bring him to me to-night at the time when the guard is changed. Come by the side door and attend to it that thou art not observed."

Stenka dropped three lumps of sugar into His Excellency's glass.

"Yes, Barin."

CHAPTER II

A DISCUSSION AT MIDNIGHT

BORIS EVANOVICH ORLOF let the door of the Railroad Administration Building slam behind him, and strolled casually out into the muddy square. The band on his uniform cap and the lapels of his overcoat were adorned with two intertwined horns, the insignia of his service in the Department of Ways and Communications, and high up on the façade of the station building the same insignia glinted in the last rays of the evening sun.

He crossed the square, passed through the station, and went out onto the platform.

East and west the ribbon of track disappeared into the gloom. Orlof pushed his cap back on his head and leaned against a post.

A freight train rumbled past him, stopped at the water tower to replenish the locomotive, and backed off the main track; then the hush that always preceded the coming of the Overland descended on the yard.

Orlof shifted his position and slumped farther back against the post. He was a tall, rangy man with a mop of iron-gray hair, and a face deeply lined from exposure. His brooding yellow-brown eyes looked out thoughtfully, ironically, and at times mystically, from beneath overhanging brows. Unlike many of his countrymen, his nose

did not flare at the nostrils, it rode hawklike; and in a country where men grew beards he wore only a mustache, which was the more noticeable because his face was scarred with a knife wound that ran diagonally from the corner of his mouth to the point of his chin. It upset the balance of his face and in moments of anger stood out startlingly, an irregular white line.

For twenty years, in railroad construction camps scattered all the way from the Urals to Port Arthur, trouble makers had learned to watch for that irregular white line. For Boris Evanovich Orlof had given the best years of his life to the construction of the Siberian railroad; and now his only ambition was to see an all-Russian system completed to the sea.

When the road had been turned south into Manchuria to avoid the taiga country below Nerchinsk, he had gone to the Governor and ignoring all the rules of etiquette had demanded an interview.

"It will delay us ten years, Excellency!" he had said, when he came into his presence. "Is it not plain that such foolishness will breed a war with Japan? And we shall be beaten—for as usual we shall drift in unprepared." There were tears of rebellion in his eyes.

His Excellency had looked past him at the portrait of the Tsar. "Then we shall wait ten years, little brother! Is it not so? . . ."

Both prophecies had come true.

And now, nearly three years after the conclusion of the war, Boris Evanovich, searching absently in the pockets of his overcoat for a cigarette, stared dourly at the ribbon of track.

The Overland swept into the station and the platform quickly filled up. Passengers taking a moment's exercise, or rushing in search of boiling water for tea, looked curiously at the engineer who lolled against his post indifferent to them all, for their presence failed to rouse him from his dream. It was only when the tail light of the departing train disappeared behind the water tower that he uncurled.

The station master preparing to go home for the night stopped a moment and slipped a friendly hand under his arm. "A little drink, Boris Evanovich?"

Orlof nodded without enthusiasm. "One might. . . ."

They went together into the buffet, and while the station master poured the vodka for both of them Orloff propped himself, with both elbows behind, on the bar. "Like your job?" he asked dryly.

The station master beamed, clinked glasses, and gulped down the contents of his own. "And why not?" he demanded. "On occasion the trains run regularly! Three days out of seven one gets to bed by ten o'clock. Now during the war . . . !" the rest of the sentence disappeared into his beard as he poured himself another drink. "Here's hoping they don't work you too hard over there across the square!"

Orlof moved impatiently. "Pushing a pencil across a map is not work for a man! Why talk of it?"

The station master buttoned his overcoat under his beard. "But there it is. One has to work at something—why not maps? Do you come my way? What's doing at the club to-night?"

Orlof paid for the drinks. "Gambling, probably. What

else is there to do in this very uninteresting world? I go with you as far as the club."

But when the station master parted from him on the doorstep Orlof did not go in. He watched him amble out of sight and then strolled after him up the street. He was plainly bored and went in any direction his feet took him.

Before he had gone far, the gray-haired old Cossack who waited on the Governor appeared from under a doorway, and followed him without speaking until they were a block or two away from the club. Then he came close up behind him.

"Barin!"

Orlof looked over his shoulder, but did not stop. "Well, Stenka?"

"His Excellency sent a word, Barin. At the time when they change the guard I am to admit thee by the side door."

Orlof turned facing him. "What else did he say to thee?"

Stenka grinned. "Nothing at all, Barin. But one has eyes. A letter has come, sealed with the crossed horns of thy service. The fat swine who writes endlessly has greatly desired to read it; and because of it Our Little Excellency omitted to drink his tea."

Orlof shot him a quick glance. "I will meet thee in the pine trees beyond the gateway." He turned back then toward the club.

When he entered, it was already filling up with army officers and officials from the many government departments and, as usual, a crowd was congregating round the

bar. Boris Evanovich came to rest beside the Governor's secretary. "One little drink for luck!" he challenged. "And then supper—after which one might perhaps induce you to shuffle the cards."

The Secretary blinked at him over his glass. "Gambling again, Boris Evanovich?"

Orlof bowed. "And why not, Mr. Secretary? One gambles because one is bored. To-night it shall be for high stakes."

He won consistently. Nevertheless, he broke up the game an hour before midnight, and in spite of the grumbling that met his departure, left the club alone. Once out in the deserted street his moodiness vanished, and by the time he reached the pine trees beyond the main entrance to the Governor's residence he was humming a tune.

He found Stenka waiting. The old Cossack handed him a long sheepskin coat such as peasants wear. "His Excellency thought that as it was a cold night . . ."

Orlof turned up the collar. "March!" he ordered. "Thy tongue is too long for a messenger."

Stenka grinned and led the way toward the side door.

They found the Governor in his private apartment seated before the stove. He was arrayed in a frayed old Chinese robe, above which his snow-white hair shone like a crown. Orlof came to a halt just inside the door and saluted formally.

The Governor acknowledged the salute just as formally, standing. Stenka took the sheepskin coat, clicked his heels, and went out.

When the door had closed Orlof took a step forward. "You sent for me, Excellency?"

The Governor pointed to an open letter on the table by his elbow. "Read that!" he said, and he sat down where he could conveniently watch Orlof's face.

Boris Evanovich glanced first at the intertwined post horns at the head of the paper, and then at the signature at the foot. After which, with evident eagerness, he read the contents at a gulp. A second time he read them, his eyes smoldering with excitement.

"An all-Russian road to the sea, Excellency!"

The Governor nodded. "It would seem so! That is to say, it would seem so if the authorization finally goes through. One never knows."

"But it will, Excellency!" The letter shook a little. "It says, positively, surveys are authorized within the next six months, and asks a confidential report immediately from this office."

The Governor checked his engineer's excitement with a grunt. "There is such a thing as politics in the East, my importunate friend! One does not expect the Japanese to twiddle their thumbs while we get ready for the next war —they have interfered to some purpose before this. And the Chinese, too, have memories."

"But, Excellency, this is to be an all-Russian road."

"Will they like it any the better for that? The stakes are precisely the same—*the Manchurian wheat fields*—though as you know we never mention the fact in public. Our enemies won the trick in the late war, and now we counter by building an all-Russian road to Vladivostok. But these Easterners are too intelligent, Boris Evano-

vich, to stand idle while we assemble our forces behind the mountains for their undoing."

Orlof laughed shortly. "Let the yellow devils, Chinese or Japanese—both or either—try their luck in the taiga! Our river men have lived in it for a hundred years and would relish such a war."

"And so, doubtless, would you." The Governor spoke patiently. "Time is obviously on their side——" He paused, and after a moment's consideration asked an abrupt question. "How long will it take to build this road?"

The answer came so promptly that it was evident Orlof had given the matter careful thought. "One year for surveys, two for construction to Blagovestchensk, two more to Khabarovsk. Then we are through to the sea and can talk to these Orientals in a language they will respect."

"Quite so," admitted the Governor dryly. "Quite so! And what do you suppose your railroad will cost?"

"Perhaps three hundred millions," Orlof answered. "But of course——"

"But of course one must feed the jackals in Petersburg!" the Governor finished his sentence for him. "Is it not so? Shall we say another hundred million or so on paper! A considerable sum, and who will be asked to pay?"

"The mujiks, Excellency—who else?"

The Governor brooded. "Who else, indeed?" There was silence while he stood up, crossed to a small table, and selected himself a cigarette. He lighted it at the match which Orlof hastened to strike. "And someday

perhaps the mujik will demand an accounting! What then?"

The builder of railroads answered without emphasis, but with such conviction that he left no doubt as to his own mind. "Revolution, Excellency!"

On the table beside them was an autographed miniature of the Tsar. Both men looked at it.

Orlof was the first to speak. "I have lived in construction camps half of my life, Excellency, and I know the mujik through and through. Revolution has been tried and failed a number of times, as it failed in 1906, but it will be tried again and again. It will break out, first in one place and then another—and some day it will succeed."

The Governor was watching his face. "Boris Evanovich, I have been administrator of a province for twenty years, extracting taxes by threats from unwilling villages. Taxes that double and double again, as the years and the wars multiply. I am an aristocrat—and because of that perhaps I do not know the mujik at all. But this I do know, that while we build railroads and fight unsuccessful wars, and perpetuate villainy in high places, we sit on the crumbling edge of a volcano. Even an aristocrat may realize that. Someday it will explode."

Orlof remained silent and when the Governor turned toward him there was a look of destiny in his eyes.

"And when the volcano explodes, little brother? . . ."

"Some of us will die, Excellency. But Russia is greater than revolutions. Russia will not die."

The Governor's answer was to salute the miniature of his Emperor. For him the Tsar was Russia.

Orlof so accepted it. He, too, saluted, and then with a touch of added respect he saluted the Governor as well: "In thy service, Excellency, as always!"

"Ah well"—His Excellency shrugged—"to administer a province is a lonely business at best, Boris Evanovich, and before we are killed we will collect some more taxes, that you may build your railroad. And the yellow men will spread sedition in your construction camps, and bribe those in high places—and bide their time! And," he added, "if I know my history, they will send a silent flood of Chinese into the taiga to do the bidding of Tsing Feng; for though hunting Chinese is an old sport with us, when politics are brewing, back they come like grasshoppers."

Orlof laughed. "Let them come, Excellency, the river men are good fighters!"

"They are good gold thieves," the Governor commented dryly. He returned to his seat by the stove. "Have you heard of Tsing Feng?"

Orlof indicated that he had not.

"Then sit down and listen; it is well you should be informed. When I was a young man in Petersburg, I was a hothead. One was mostly in a hurry in those days, Boris Evanovich, and one believed that theories would save Russia rather than loyalty and hard work. One drank a good deal and talked endlessly, and foregathered in cellars to listen to people with uncombed hair and grimy nails.

"It was in such a place that I met Tsing Feng. A Chinese student and, as I afterward found out, a Mandarin, one of the first of their highborn young men to be

sent out of China to learn the ways of the West. He was a good linguist and we made friends. Certainly we made friends, for Tsing Feng's business was to make friends, and to learn all that could be learned about Russia and her aims in the East; and I was heir to the Shustof tradition of service to the Tsar—destined one day to govern a province. What more could he ask?

"Then, quite suddenly, one day he left Russia.

"But one does not forget such a man as Tsing Feng, and for ten years after that I heard of him; in Berlin, in London, in other capitals. Then came silence—until the Chinese Eastern Railroad was about to be built.

"At that time I was already governor, as you know, and one day we ran across each other in Harbin. To all appearance we met as old friends, but under cover we fought each other every foot of the way. Tsing Feng lost and the railroad was built.

"Again he disappeared, or at least I lost sight of him, until six months before the war. He was in Tokio then, and the history of the war is to a large extent the history of Tsing Feng, for he is a great man; clever because he never comes out into the open, and strong because he has the patience of an Oriental, and dangerous to us because he is a patriot.

"We have been enemies now for a long time, Boris Evanovich, and I do not doubt that you will feel Tsing Feng's hand in the taiga. If you meet I would like you to give him my regards. I respect a man who is a patriot, even when it happens to be my business to oppose him at every turn. But you will not meet him; he is too shrewd to show his hand at this stage of the game."

The Governor put down the burned-out end of his cigarette. "A little secret history, Boris Evanovich!—And now, will your road follow the river, or do we look for easier country inland?"

"I do not know yet, Excellency," Orlof answered. "Give me six months—or four, if six is too long."

"Are you known on the river?"

"Not as an engineer, Excellency. Perhaps one or two will remember me as a deck hand; I worked my way upstream from Khabarovsk after the war; I was interested to see the river."

"Umph! Well, tell your friends you have applied for six months' leave; I want you to find out for me where this troublesome road must go."

Orlof looked as a man looks when he has received promotion. "I will seek out a man who knows the taiga to the north, and turn hunter," he said.

The Governor considered. "Have you heard of the foreign engineer, Stephen Wyld, who mines gold on the Davenda stream?"

"One has heard of him, of course. Rumor says of him that he is a little tsar in his own valley—it is talked about at the club."

His Excellency chuckled. "Many things are talked about at the club! However I will give you a letter to Stephen Wyld and you can judge for yourself. The letter will authorize you to draw on him for supplies. You will also be provided with a permit to prospect, which you can use if you see fit, and as secrets are hard to keep in Chita perhaps I will visit this foreigner myself and re-

ceive your report at his mine. It will keep the club guessing, which will not be a bad thing."

He fell into a reverie and Orlof sat waiting his final word.

"Your orders are, not to write to me. I will either meet you in August at the Foreigner's mine or find a way to send you further instructions."

Orlof rose and saluted. "Until August then, Excellency!"

The Governor rose also, and, dropping all formality, tucked his hand under the younger man's arm. While he walked with him to the door he fell into the intimate form of address. "Thy railroad will not be built for a long time, Boris Evanovich. Taxes are too high. However, spend the summer in the taiga making thy map, and until official surveys are ordered say nothing . . . Nothing at all!" He stopped by the door and patted Orlof affectionately on both arms. "Thou wilt make a proper gold thief, little brother; and do not forget the yellow men!" He opened the door himself.

When it closed again he went back to his chair. As he passed the table he picked up the letter from the Minister of Ways and Communications and locked it in a private drawer.

CHAPTER III

WHEN THE ICE WENT OUT

IT MADE little difference to Peter whether Stepan Stepanovich left home for an hour or for a month. If he could possibly so manage things he followed, with the unquestioning fidelity of a dog. Into the mine; or out into the taiga; or merely to wait discreetly at a distance while strangers were being entertained. Peter was patient and his Barin was his Barin.

On occasion he would be driven to eloquence to account for his devotion. "Did he not pull me out of the water when I was still nothing but a child?"—Peter was supposed to be sixteen, though no one knew his age for certain; the incident had happened when he was about ten. "Did he not find me in the taiga when my father was shot for stealing gold? Did he not thereafter teach me to read?—and that, look you, is a great thing. There will come a time when I shall be his head man and give orders to mujiks such as thee. Why, then, should not one carry his shoes and on occasion keep the flies from tickling his baby's nose? Of a certainty such work is properly for girls, but what of it?—Anna Mihaelovna must in no wise be disturbed; and for such things she has given me Easter boots, which again is to be remembered for a long time."

And because Anna Mihaelovna, who had once been

Joan Fielding and was now Stephen Wyld's wife, knew that Peter was trustworthy and loyal, he found in her a good ally.

Thus, in the spring of 1908 when Stephen had business in Gorbitza and Peter was wild to accompany him, she released him from his self-imposed duties as nursemaid to her little son, and persuaded Stephen to take him along. He was a good horseboy and an excellent forager after game. Stephen would find him useful.

Their destination was a post station ten versts upstream. The season was a late one and the break-up of the ice was not expected for some days. Stephen hoped to be safely in Gorbitza before it occurred.

Riding, as was seemly, a pace or two behind his Barin, Peter forded the Davenda stream for the last time and followed him along the bank of the great waterway. He was a shock-headed, stockily built boy, and like every peasant on the river wore baggy trousers tucked into shoepacks and, above them, a high-necked shirt belted at the waist and hanging halfway to the knees. The belt, except on holidays, was of leather or, more often, a piece of rope or plaited rawhide. On holidays it became a gaily colored sash, worn over a white tunic which was heavily embroidered at the neck and wrists and round the bottom hem.

Peter's nose was of the typical peasant variety, flat, with spreading nostrils; and his eyes were darkest brown. But unlike the average peasant's, they were pondering, thoughtful eyes, perpetually questing into problems not easily to be understood. They mirrored thoughts far be-

yond his ken. It was his eyes that had caught the Foreigner's attention at the beginning, and had gained for him the almost unheard-of opportunity to learn to read.

The boy looked about him now without satisfaction. He had unslung his gun; but a third of a mile of rotten ice filled the river channel from bank to bank, and stretched away endlessly, both up and downstream, as far as the eye could see.

"Ach! the pity of it," he grumbled. "The ice should be gone a week; and then there would be ducks! Ducks for supper, Barin, would be a good thing."

Stephen studied the condition of the ice. For him the river, in all of its moods, provided endless fascination. Often when he was miles inland he was conscious of it thrusting its way through the mountains toward the sea. More than all other things it had made history for the province. For a hundred years it had been the only defense against the Chinese. Latterly, with Russia's move southward into Manchuria, it had seemingly ceased to make history, but nonetheless it still dominated the lives of those descendants of Catherine the Great's Cossacks, who lived so precariously on its banks.

It fed them with its fish; it devastated their lowlands with its floods; and it brought, or withheld, news of the outside world. They loved it and on occasion feared it; and they heeded its lightest whisper. And when one or another of them was nipped in its ice packs, or drowned in its whirlpools, they crossed themselves humbly and went back to the fields. Who was a mujik that he should be one to complain?

Now, in the stillness of the afternoon, the river was muttering to itself and Peter, sensing the fact, looked sideways at the Foreigner who, for all his learning, was strangely ignorant of simple things.

"Barin, one hears it talking! The ice is about to go."

Stephen nodded. "Soon, perhaps, but not to-night. We will be in Gorbitza before it spoils our trail."

The boy said nothing more, but his ear tuned to such things from birth knew that this was not so.

Ahead, the channel narrowed into a sort of gateway and they were forced to climb a bluff. On descending to the level again, they entered a stretch of bottom land which was interspersed with swamp and patches of alder and birch, to avoid which the trail clung close to the river bank.

Peter kicked his pony anxiously until he came up to the Foreigner's knee. "Barin, at such times one should camp before it gets dark. If the river goes suddenly mad . . ."

Stephen laughed. "Even so we will sleep in the post station, Petroushka, and perhaps, between us, we may shoot enough rabchick for supper, otherwise we will eat nothing but bread."

Peter fell behind again. Twice he heard rabchick piping in the swamps, but he kept the matter to himself and held his attention dourly on the ice. Stephen apparently sensed nothing unusual, for he rode steadily on, immersed in his thoughts.

They were halfway across the flats when, with a resounding crack, a pressure ridge split, reared up on end, and disappeared. Instantly, through the hole, a stream of water fifty feet wide flooded over the ice and began eat-

ing into the rotten margin of the break. It spread like a stain on the surface of a cloth, and the muttering of the undertow rose to a growl.

Stephen pulled his horse up short.

It was the first time he had actually seen the ice break up. It fascinated him, and for the moment at least he was not conscious of pressing danger. "By gosh!" he said in English. "By gosh, it really is going out!"

They were on the very edge of the bank and at a point in the trail where it was not more than a few feet above normal water level. Peter, also, had pulled up but not to waste time in sightseeing. He was searching everywhere for the quickest way of escape. When the river was angry one got respectfully out of its way.

Two versts upstream there was another headland, but too far away to be of use. Across the bottom lands, a criss-cross of narrow but mostly unfordable creeks separated them from the hills. Behind, the rocky gateway threw its shoulder out into the river, restraining its flow and making a perfect setting for a jam. Peter pushed up alongside the Foreigner and began actually tugging at his knee.

"Barin!—One must go!"

The note of fear in his voice caught Stephen's attention. But even so he loitered a moment, enthralled. In this short interval the river seemed literally to have shaken itself alive; already the widening stream of water was tearing away great masses of ice, which piled and careened, and piled again, in a mad rush to pass the gateway below. And now the shore ice had cracked and joined

the maelstrom. Stephen noticed that the water was beginning to rise.

"Quickly, Barin!"—Peter's voice was high-pitched and insistent—"in a little moment it will be too late!"

Stephen wheeled his horse round and looked downstream. The rocky bluff behind warned him it was indeed time to go. He had heard folklore tales of the river when it went on the rampage and the memory was disquieting. How fast would the water rise?

Peter, without waiting on the order of his going, was already shaping his course for the hills. Stephen caught him at the first mud-bottomed creek. Their ponies floundered through up to their saddle girths. The second creek balked them, leading them into a swamp and turning them back toward the river bank.

Another fifteen minutes of floundering brought them out close to their starting point. In the interval, the water had risen ten feet, while great masses of ice nosed their way into the meadows, breaking down saplings and cutting off the trail toward the headland that was causing the jam. The river was talking to some purpose now, so that even a foreigner could understand.

Stephen Wyld took stock of the situation with what, to Peter, seemed exasperating deliberation. Yet, in spite of his many unfathomable ways, the boy trusted him as he trusted no one else in the world. He waited his Barin's word, and his primitive young soul surged forward exultantly to meet the mighty strength of the flood. "Was it not something to have seen such a thing even if one were to die?" But he sighed with regret to think that his Easter boots would not go with him to his grave.

Stephen interrupted his preoccupation by pointing upstream. He spoke with authority, sharply: "Go in front, Peter—in that direction—the bank is higher. Scurry, go quickly!"

Peter's pony backed away snorting from the pounding ice, but the boy sat still. "Barin, it is my service to go behind."

Stephen's mouth was grimly humorous as he swung his own horse round, splashing fetlock deep through water that had already inundated the trail. Rather than risk the swamps he was abandoning a second attempt to reach the hills, and was heading upstream toward a knoll that rose somewhat above the general level of the flats.

How far would the water rise? Half an hour ago that knoll would have looked safe in the wildest flood, but now he was not so sure.

As though to emphasize the risk, his horse plunged head first into what, a few minutes before, had been the outlet of a creek. In the breathless scramble that brought them to solid ground again, he realized that swimming in such whirlpools of ice would be a short-lived business. He looked back for Peter.

The boy was encouraging his pony with profanity and soft-voiced diminutives, which came fitfully above the noises of the flood. They dived together, and came up together, wound about with willow withes and more profanity as they achieved momentary safety. The pony stumbled and came down on his nose and Peter, breathless but by no means dismayed, jerked him expertly to his feet. "Come up! thou cholera-stricken cow——" And

then, with a quick eye to the possibilities ahead, he turned to Stephen: "Barin, one is waiting to go on."

They pushed ahead now side by side, for the trail was obliterated by water which reached to their horses' knees, and by common consent and regardless of obstructions, they drove straight for the knoll, a fast-diminishing island in the flood. They reached it just as their horses began to swim.

Minute by minute the water continued to rise until there was scarcely room for them to stand.

Peter watched their island recede with brooding attention. The river was the river . . . one could not complain.

But presently he made a remark. "Barin, for this we should buy a candle for our saints!"

He spoke with such final conviction that it amounted to a statement that the danger was past. But Stephen had no such assurance, for the water was still rising. He half thought of saying so but Peter's attention was obviously withdrawn. He was listening.

The uncanny, earthquake-like noises of the ice piling itself higher and higher against the headland were sinking, gradually, to an evening calm; the lake that now surrounded them lapped quietly and still more quietly over the last few inches of their knoll; icebergs no longer rammed each other crazily but floated placidly beside their reflections. And a giant crane, appearing from nowhere, flew up the center of the river dragging its unwieldy legs behind.

The end came suddenly in the direction of the head-

land. There was a roar that split the silence like a bomb. Ice and water shot high into the air. The jam broke. Echoes jostled each other hither and thither through the hills, until they wore themselves out. Little eddies that grew quickly into whirlpools sucked floating logs into their maw. The whole river rose and shook itself—ready once again to pursue its interrupted journey to the sea.

Peter sighed, and then with a whimsical puckering of his face that was not far from tears remarked: "The little Mischa will be glad we are not killed, Barin! One will still be able to brush the flies from his nose. Such a crinkly little nose, Barin, when he is suddenly wakened by flies!"

Stephen smiled at this reference to his infant son, but he was preoccupied with the possibility of there being a second jam, with disastrous results to their refuge. Peter, however, appeared satisfied for he busied himself with the horses as though without question they would soon be ready to go on.

He proved to be right. In half an hour they were picking their way across the débris thrown up by the flood, headed by the shortest practicable route toward the hills.

They off-saddled in the entrance to a side valley where there was pasture for the horses. When Peter had pulled off Stephen's boots he asked permission to hunt. "Rabchick always return to the flats after a flood, Barin; and I have looked at the bread, most of it is spoiled."

As there was no question of their continuing their journey that night, the boy was soon skirting the edge of the flats with every faculty alert for game.

Perhaps half a verst from their camp he came to an abrupt halt, for suddenly he had come upon the carcass

of a dead horse. It lay, spread-eagle, on its side with a cake of ice stranded on its rump. The horse was saddled and bridled, and had evidently been drowned while its rider was attempting to escape the rising waters of the flood.

The boy looked about him for a second corpse, but instead espied a man sitting quietly on top of an isolated rock.

He walked toward him, placidly and without hurry, as though drowned horses and marooned strangers were all in the day's work.

The man was unusual in that he wore no beard. Like Peter he was taking the occasion calmly, for he was eating the remains of a loaf of bread.

Peter looked him over in detail. "Well, Scarface," he remarked dispassionately. "And why dost thou not come down?"

The Stranger finished his mouthful. "My horse is drowned, little man, and my last match is soaked. One dries faster on this rock."

Peter considered him in silence while the Stranger's attention wandered out over the water-soaked flats. Presently it came back to the boy. "How often does thy accursed river go mad?" he asked.

Peter shrugged. "What does anyone know?—It tells its secrets only to God. But, if thou canst behave thyself in the presence of a foreigner, there is a fire to dry thyself by, back there at the entrance to the valley. I myself shoot rabchick for the Foreigner's supper. In a little while I shall return."

He left him to his own devices.

When he was out of sight the Stranger slipped down from his rock, and after he had removed his saddle and saddlebags from the carcass of his horse he walked off in the direction of the smoke, which he could see in the distance rising through the trees.

CHAPTER IV

PETER CHANGES HIS SERVICE

AS BORIS EVANOVICH came up to the fire, the foreign engineer looked at him with some interest. All sorts and conditions of men traveled up and down the river, which was the one open thoroughfare through the wild taiga country; and many of them shunned questions, preferring to keep their business and their destination to themselves.

"Then I'm not the only one to get caught in this flood," the Foreigner remarked casually. "I see you had to swim for it. And your horse—you lost it?"

Orlof let his saddle slip to the ground. "Drowned!" he answered tersely. "It does not greatly matter, it was not a good one."

In his turn, he took stock of the Foreigner, who at the moment was occupied with the homely business of drying his socks. Even so, there was something about his profile which marked him as a man accustomed to give rather than take orders. If he were not exactly "a little tsar" in his own valley, as rumor had it in Chita, at least he was one who would be obeyed—probably, even, one who would command loyalty from those who served under him. The builder of railroads understood such things.

From the direction of the river a shot broke into the silence that had fallen between them. Stephen Wyld smiled. "The boy, Peter, has found game. Stop and share

it, and in the meantime dry yourself out. May one ask in what direction you go?"

Orlof shrugged. "To begin with I go in search of a new horse!" He was emptying some water-soaked cigarettes and a carefully wrapped bundle of papers out of his pocket. He spread them on the end of a log, and only when he had satisfied himself that the papers had not been ruined by water did he divest himself of his outer garments and sit down.

The Foreigner watched the whole process in silence; the man roused his curiosity. He wore no beard and a scar on his chin called attention to his face; it was not the face of a peasant in spite of his rough clothes. Stephen waited until he had pulled off his boots, and then remarked casually: "You will scarcely get another horse this side of Gorbitza—if you are traveling that way. But perhaps you know the river better than I do."

Orlof left the implied question unanswered. "I see you are not a Russian. Am I, then, addressing the one whom they speak of hereabouts as 'the Foreigner'?"

Stephen nodded. "Among the peasants I am known as the Foreigner, or by those who know me as Stepan Stepanovich. In my own country, Stephen Wyld."

Orlof bowed, and produced the Governor's letter. "The flood has perhaps served me a good turn; but for it I might have passed you on the trail. I was on my way to you with this letter, the river seems to have decreed that I deliver it here."

His Excellency's handwriting was none of the best, and the paper was water-stained in parts. Stephen spelled it out word by word. At the end, he held out his hand. "Any-

one coming to me from the Governor is welcome, Boris Evanovich. In what way can I serve?"

Orlof smiled. "If you can outfit me with horses and a guide!—and perhaps supplies for a month?"

Stephen considered the letter a second time. "The Governor, I understand, is sending you into the country beyond the Amazar to prospect for gold, and he wishes the matter kept entirely secret. It cannot be done, my friend. In a week the whole taiga will be alive with rumors."

Orlof nodded agreement. "I told His Excellency as much. Perhaps I shall be wise not to use my permit, but from you or elsewhere I must have an outfit and a guide. I must have someone with me who is familiar with these ranges, or I shall fail in what I have undertaken to do."

Stephen folded and unfolded the letter. "If you were bent on prospecting for gold you would need a hishnik as a guide. Such men know the streams intimately. But such a man would be curious to know who you were, and why you were here. For one thing it is the wrong time of year to be prospecting, and gold thieves are suspicious folk, as I have learned to my cost."

Orlof moved a burning stick with deliberation. "Many people besides hishniks are suspicious since the war, Stepan Stepanovich! Shall we say this?—I need a guide who knows the taiga intimately. The rest is not so important, provided he can of a certainty hold his tongue. The last *is* important, and I must be satisfied."

Stephen referred to the letter again. It was marked "Confidential" and, significantly, the Governor had not dictated it to his secretary. Something, evidently, was brewing in Chita which smacked of politics, and in Rus-

sia an experienced foreigner left politics very strictly alone. "All right—no more questions!" he decided. When he looked up, he found Orlof watching him closely, measuring him. Their eyes met and held across the fire.

"His Excellency has assured me that you are a man of discretion," Orlof said quietly.

Stephen smiled. "I see! Well then, I must contrive to find you a guide who will be discreet also. Unfortunately, in all the taiga I know but two such men. One is old Sablin, the hishnik, but on occasion he drinks and then he is anything but discreet."

"We will eliminate Sablin," announced Orlof decidedly.

"The other is Evan, the horse trader. He never talks too much, and as far as I know he never gets drunk, and he belongs to the taiga more than all other men in this part of the world; but unfortunately I do not know where he is to be found."

"But you can make inquiries?" Orlof asked hopefully.

Stephen shrugged. "The horse trader minds his own business too well, it is never easy to follow his trail. But if you can give me a month?"

"I do not want to give you a week."

Stephen looked amused. "Forgive me for saying so, but if all officials were as energetic as you, His Excellency would be better served."

Orlof bowed. And at that moment a second shot broke into their conversation. "There's Peter again——" the Foreigner began.

He paused—abruptly—as though a sudden idea had come to him; then very carefully examined his socks to

see if they were drying. At the end of a long minute he looked up. "As I remarked: there is the boy Peter again! . . . That shot did more than kill a rabchick for supper, it gave me an idea. Suppose you take Peter?"

"Take that boy out there on the flats?—the one who invited me to your fire?" Orlof sounded uncertain. "Surely he is very young for what I want?"

Stephen chuckled. "I do not know for certain how old he is, perhaps fifteen or sixteen, but there never was another Peter! He was born in the taiga, somewhere hereabouts. His father was a hishnik, and like many another was shot by an official notorious in these parts a few years ago. As a result, Peter nurses a feud against all officials and, perhaps naturally, does not discriminate. That is the trouble. If he were to suspect you of being one, I could never persuade him to go."

Orlof nodded with ready understanding. "Bad officials are the curse of the country! Some day perhaps we will improve . . . but in the meantime——"

"In the meantime," the Foreigner intervened, "the best advice I can give is to take Peter. That is if, between us, we can induce him to go."

Orlof looked puzzled. "Induce him to go? Is it really, then, so difficult to hire a peasant boy such as he? Surely the offer of money——"

"Not with Peter!" Stephen broke in. "You see, in a manner of speaking, when his father was killed we adopted each other, and since that time he has adopted my wife also, and, though he would never admit it, my baby as well. As for myself"—Stephen smiled reminiscently—"he watches over me with the fidelity of a dog.

In his eyes I am an incomprehensible foreigner—one strangely ignorant, who goes constantly in need of advice and protection—and when necessary he sees that I get it. I have learned to depend on Peter."

"I like that," Orlof answered quietly. "It sounds loyal. One sees so little of that in my trade."

The Foreigner let the remark pass.

It was dusk before Peter appeared with two rabchik dangling from his belt. "Where is the Foreigner?" he demanded at once, and then he caught sight of him fifty yards beyond the fire, picketing the horses for the night.

He snorted his disapproval. "Mooning beside the fire, Useless One, while my Barin attends to the horses! With both eyes shut it is plain that he is used to service from such as thee."

Orlof roused from a brown study. "A good traveler attends to such things himself. Wouldst thou permit me, a stranger, to picket thy Barin's horses for the night?"

Peter looked somewhat mollified. "Even so, I will permit thee to serve him by cleaning these rabchick for his supper!" He turned to go to Stephen, but paused a moment to look back. "And remember, Mr. Stranger, that thou art not overly hungry at supper, for between the pair of us we must eat only one bird."

Boris Evanovich looked curiously at the homely little figure with its torn shirt and peasant's clothes. "So this is Peter," he mused, "who nurses a blood feud against all officials. . . . With no thought more ambitious than to serve his Barin, he yet carries his head in a manner that is not of the peasants. Undoubtedly, on occasion, he is-

sues his own commands!" He reached over for a bird and began plucking it. "A hishnik's son . . . perhaps to be in the service of His Excellency . . . such a thing will be interesting! Of a certainty His Excellency will need loyalty in the days that are ahead." His thoughts ranged outward to the railroad.

He was cleaning the second rabchick before the Foreigner, with the boy who had adopted him, came into the circle of the firelight. Peter was talking freely, gesticulating, giving his Barin advice. Rumor stated that, on more than one occasion, this foreigner had done the same thing to the Governor himself. Orlof's thoughts took a new turn. Perhaps it was only in a country that smoldered on the brink of revolution that such things were possible . . . and yet, all his life he had known that Russia, in spite of its aristocracy, was democratic to the core.

Peter interrupted his musings with preparations for supper. He ignored the Stranger completely, and looked on with disfavor when Stephen refused more than his share of the birds. Neither did he take part in the conversation that followed the meal until his Barin spoke directly to him.

"Boris Evanovich will go with us to Gorbitza, Peter, and we must share horses with him on the way."

Peter looked across the fire at Orlof with an altogether new respect. This stranger, then, must be somebody of importance that his Barin would do such a thing. It was no little matter to share horses on the road. He voiced his reflections in his own way.

"Who am I, Barin, that I should not walk? If the river is not angry, of a certainty I can reach Gorbitza on

foot in two days; and there are ducks, and one has a gun."

"And if the ice jams again—what then?" Stephen asked. "One might easily be drowned."

Peter shrugged, a little patiently. "Does it not speak before it gets angry, Barin?" The Stranger's eyes were on him and suddenly he added in a low voice: "It whispers to those who know."

Stephen intercepted the look of ready sympathy that passed between them. Two Russians together!—it made him feel an alien.

It was Orlof who spoke next. "I have made up my mind, Stepan Stepanovich, to look no farther for a guide."

"Then tell him, your own way," Stephen suggested.

Peter, sensing something unusual, looked on with exaggerated indifference while Orlof unfolded a map and spread it out in front of him on the ground.

But he was not able to maintain his assumed detachment.

In the flickering light of the camp fire the great waterway easily dominated the whole sheet, and in a moment the boy was leaning forward almost reverently, one grimy fist bunched against the corner to hold it against the breeze. Had not his Barin taught him to read, and had he not taught himself to trace the course of side streams which some day would be prospected for gold? But this! . . . Such a thing was magic, hardly to be believed! It was colored . . . it spoke almost as clearly as a book. He got his bearings rapidly. Blue for the river and brown for the mountains. A child could understand—and of a certainty the mountains fought with the river, driving it

in one mighty sweep north, and then south again, until it disappeared at the opposite corner of the map.

One by one, names sprang up to greet him. Familiar places that he knew. Kara, of evil memory . . . Post stations along the river . . . Gorbitza, where he was born . . . His forefinger reached out to mark the latter spot, followed the course of the Gorbitza stream to its source, wavered south into the Davenda country, and came uncertainly to rest on a shaded area which indicated the Divide.

Obviously puzzling, and altogether absorbed, he leaned closer still. Orlof, watching him, smiled, and then as the moments dragged out, searched for and lighted a cigarette.

He had smoked half of it when Peter's head came up scornfully. His finger jabbed savagely into a brown smudge on the map. "It tells lies!" he said tensely.

"Lies? In what way does it lie?"

Peter's finger moved surely over fifty versts of country. "The tundra runs so! . . . and the Amazar so! . . . Gospodi! If one were to believe the half of what it says one would walk into a trap."

Orlof examined the offending section critically. "Between us then we might put it right, Petroushka! for it is my business to make maps. Come with me and help!"

"Well-born—thou art one who makes maps?" . . . Peter's voice was breathless—unbelieving, yet struggling to believe, as for the first time he accorded Orlof his title.

Boris Evanovich nodded very seriously. "That is my business, Petroushka, that and other things. And when one learns of a map that it tells lies, one takes a guide

into the taiga and searches for the truth, so that those who come behind shall not fall into a trap." He waited a moment for the information to sink in, and then added: "But in the taiga country a guide is necessary, and therefore I have come to Stepan Stepanovich and talked to him, and he tells me that thou art a hishnik's son and can show me the trails. If thou wilt go with me, between us we may fashion a new map that is better. Is it agreed?"

Peter's body stiffened and his eyes leaped to Stephen's, a whole battery of questions ready to break forth. But his Barin's decided nod checked them.

"Barin, thou dost order me to go?"

A stick cracked and rolled out of the fire, and instinctively the boy's hand shot out to protect the map.

"Order thee? One does not order, Petroushka. But I am willing that thou shalt go. Always thou hast lived in the taiga, and to go on such a journey with Boris Evanovich will be a new thing."

Peter digested this. "But there is Anna Mihaelovna and the little Mischa, Barin! One will be lonely."

Stephen nodded again. "Anna Mihaelovna will understand. To go on such a journey with Boris Evanovich will be like going to school. Thou wilt learn to make maps, and that is education. For what purpose hast thou been taught to read?"

The answer came promptly and with decision. "So that one day I may be thy head man, Barin! I have thought of it many times."

Orlof and Stephen exchanged glances. Peter grinned shyly. "But there it is! Who am I but a mujik?—and of a certainty a head man must go to school."

Before Stephen could answer Orlof had put an arm round the boy's shoulder. "We will make a bargain, Petroushka. When the map is finished, if thy Barin is willing, between us we will find thee a school. Such things can be done with determination."

For twenty momentous seconds Peter sat perfectly still. Then he swung round on Stephen with a single word.

"Barin——?"

Stephen responded in all seriousness. "So that thou dost serve Boris Evanovich in all particulars as thou hast served me, I will see that the promise is kept."

There was a noise as though Peter was having difficulty in his throat. Then he faced Orlof and, with his two hands to his forehead, fingertips together, palms inward, he gave the peasants' salute of fealty. "Until the snow comes, Barin, I am thy man."

Orlof held out his hand. "Until the snow comes, Petroushka!" And then, as though between Russians sufficient had been said, he began to roll himself another cigarette.

But half an hour later, when Peter had gone to look after the horses, the Foreigner added another remark. "It will be interesting when that boy discovers that you are an official in the Governor's pay."

Orlof answered indirectly out of the depths of his thoughts. "Someday, who knows, one may introduce him to the Governor."

And Peter, adjusting a picket rope, laughed softly into the night, and on his way back to the fire danced a step or two of the maddest Easter dance he knew.

CHAPTER V

FEENGA

TWO evenings later, when the village of Gorbitza was cooking its evening meal, a pack train approached from downstream.

Ne Ah Bo, a Chinese peddler, rode in the lead, while Peter, astride a pack horse, brought up the rear. Peter had been overtaken by the Chinaman a few hours after he had left camp, and had at once started to harangue him in a jargon of pidgin and Russian which was as native to him as his own tongue; but by what mixture of lying and cajolery he had attached himself to the pack train was a secret that he would not have imparted even to his beloved Barin.

Ne Ah Bo was one of the many soft-spoken Chinese who followed the time-honored traffic in stolen gold. With the departure of the ice, such peddlers appeared as suddenly as the flowers, loaded their packs, and slipped away into the ranges, to emerge again with the coming of the snow.

Every season some of them were murdered for their gold dust. When this happened the taiga asked no questions and the yellow men made no complaints; occasionally the officials wrote protocols, but for the most part they shrugged their shoulders and passed on. Those whose throats were not cut disappeared into the uncharted coun-

try to the south—and the villagers were not curious. An Asiat was merely an Asiat, given to minding his own business . . . useful enough if one had stolen dust to sell.

Since babyhood Peter had been accustomed to such happenings, they were a part of the world in which he lived; and silence in such matters was native to him. But unlike the villagers he was interested in the Asiats. In the old days when his father was alive, they had, on occasion, smiled thoughtfully at him and given him sugar, and allowed him to rummage in their packs.

But now that he was growing up and had attached himself to the Foreigner, such intimacies had ceased. The yellow men treated him as though he were an official, and Peter disliked officials—on the trip to Gorbitza he puzzled over the matter.

During their meals, he prodded Ne Ah Bo with questions which, however, went unanswered. At last, the peddler's obstinate wall of silence made Peter curious. Was it that such a man worked for a barin who ordered him into the taiga—where his throat might so easily be cut? Or was he just another masterless one, intent only on trade?

There Ne Ah Bo sat, a wizened, elderly man whose expression told nothing at all, yet the boy, watching him, intuitively sensed loyalty and history, and a steady purpose that made him think of a priest, of books, of a wisdom that made him restless, seeing it could never be his. Such a one, for all his dirt, might be an educated person —an engineer—or, like Boris Evanovich, a maker of maps. The possibility occupied his imagination most of the way to Gorbitza.

Even so, when the trail entered the willows on the bank of the Gorbitza stream, he abandoned his host without even a gesture of farewell. Not that he had anything to hide, rather was he proud in the possession of a gun and a number of ducks that dangled from his belt. But the instinct of a hishnik's son prompted him at all times to avoid publicity.

Thus he entered the village inconspicuously, and from one by-path to another headed in the direction of the church. A little before he reached it, he stopped to look over the gate of a corral. Inside, was the usual untidy assortment of implements and sledges, an open shed for livestock, and, in one corner, the house where the family lived. It was in no way different from a thousand others to be found in villages everywhere, and as usual was populated by many chickens and pigs.

But this particular yard seemed to interest Peter, for he stood quite still looking in at the gate until the door opened and an old woman appeared. She seemed to be in a bad temper for, after calling for someone, she clouted an inquisitive sow on the nose and stood looking dourly toward the gate.

Peter ducked behind the fence, and with a shrewd glance at the smoke pouring from the chimney, made off down the lane. He dodged across the main street and came out on the river bank.

The bank was fringed with stranded icebergs and all the insanitary refuse of a long winter thrown out for the first flood to carry away, and in the midst of this garbage dump a girl was dipping water out of a pool. Peter

watched her fill both her pails and attach them to the yoke which she carried over her shoulders. Then he sat down and waited, intent with mischievousness, while she picked her way toward him, barefoot, over the refuse. She did not see him until he startled her by whispering her name.

"Feenga!"

"Peter!" She stopped so suddenly that water slopped out of her buckets. Her eyes, still startled, looked into his with eager friendliness. "Peter—bad one! whispering to frighten me!" Then quickly her manner changed almost to sulkiness. "Useless one! All day I have watched for thee until the old woman threatened a beating."

Peter grinned hugely. "If thou dost not hurry she will beat thee again. She is waiting for thee in the yard."

Feenga looked defiant. *"That for her!"* . . . She deposited her pails and squatted on her heels facing him, and while Peter continued to grin she tucked a lock of hair under the handkerchief that she wore peasant fashion round her head. It was a gay holiday kerchief that Peter had given her, and neither of them had forgotten the fact.

She took a corner of it gingerly between her teeth. "Thy precious foreigner reached Gorbitza yesterday," she remarked resentfully.

Peter's grin widened considerably. "One was busy!" he condescended.

Feenga ruffled with contempt. "Busy hunting ducks, while thy foreigner goes with a stranger. What kind of a service is that?"

Peter's grin shifted sideways. "Two of the ducks are

for thee!" He detached the two fattest and laid them shyly in her lap.

The girl's eyes snapped. "One was lonely yesterday," she conceded, by way of thanks.

Peter's whole body wriggled, but no words reached the surface. He wiped his nose on his shirt sleeve, and then they looked at each other and laughed.

"The ice jammed above Davenda mouth, and the Stranger's horse was drowned. He is a well-born. There was nothing to do—it was my service to go on foot."

Feenga spread a duck's wing fanwise across her body. "That was a grown man's job to walk from Davenda mouth in two days," she volunteered. The wing moved rhythmically with her breathing and glistened richly in contrast with her apron, which was none too clean. Peter was aware of a tightening in his throat. Something had happened to Feenga since he was last in Gorbitza. She had changed. When she looked at him over the duck's wing he wanted to touch her, but he did not dare. He was relieved when she spoke.

"I saw the Stranger when I went to the guest house for thee. He has a scar on his chin."

Peter leaned nearer, portentously. "Cross thyself three times, and hear a secret!"

Feenga's hand moved with extreme rapidity across the duck's wing. Her eyes, glued to his, swore unutterable silence.

Even so, Peter challenged her. "Thou wilt tell no one?"

Feenga was hurt. Her back straightened like a young

sapling. "Do I not wear thy handkerchief? Do I not get beaten because of thee? Never again! . . ."

She was scrambling to her feet when he stopped her. Somehow his hand found its way into hers and stayed there snugly. "Be still, silly one. I was teasing!"

He attempted a masculine indifference, then slipped into excited seriousness. "Thou knowest, Feenga, that in all the taiga I would tell no one but thee."

She waited. . . .

Such a moment was too important for haste, and Peter took a long breath. "Thou hast seen the Stranger with the scar on his chin. Two nights ago, at the place where the ice jammed, he——"

The sentence was never finished because Feenga suddenly ducked, and Peter received the resounding box on the ear which had been intended for her. It knocked him sideways. Someone was standing over him, aiming another blow. He dodged expertly and scrambled to his feet, to face the angry old woman he had watched from the gate of the corral.

She lunged after him and missed. Peter spat, deliberately insulting her. "Tf-oo-ee!"

It caused a fresh explosion of wrath which gave Feenga time to snatch up her buckets and flee. Whereupon Peter spoke soothingly. "Noo-oo, Staroushka! Surely it was from the beginning my fault. And see, I have ducks for thee!" He picked up the two Feenga had dropped.

The old woman stopped cursing, and Peter straightway began to bargain. "Thou wilt not beat her? If thou wilt swear, I will give thee three—three of the fattest."

She held out her hand. "What is a beating for a good-for-nothing? . . ."

"Cross thyself!" he demanded.

She did so, and Peter handed over the bribe. "But remember!" he added. "Thou art an old liar, and should she be beaten I will turn thy pigs out into the street."

The Old One shook her fist at him. "To the devil with all hishniks' brats! If I catch thee with Feenga! . . ." a gesture finished out the sentence.

Peter grinned. "Oh well—it is all one, Staroushka!"

In spite of her threat, an hour after supper he was perched on top of her gate waiting for Feenga. It was not the first time he had waited for Feenga. She would finish her work and fuss in front of her mirror under the icon, and then when the Old One was safely in bed she would creep out and climb up on the gate, and pretend to be surprised. Girls were like that, and there was nothing to do about it!

He was prepared to be patient, however, for a great idea had come to him. He listened, half consciously, to the murmur of the river and wrestled with big thoughts while he waited.

In the guest house he had come upon the Foreigner and his new Barin. They were talking in undertones, but he had long ears and some of it he had overheard. It seemed that the making of maps was an altogether stupendous undertaking—not to be thought of lightly as one would steal a little gold. . . .

Through the Amazar country . . . out over the ranges into the headwaters of the Zeya . . . down to

Blagovestchensk . . . and beyond, to places of which he had never heard. . . .

And it would seem, too, that like gold thieves those who made maps kept their business to themselves, for when they had eaten supper the Foreigner had talked to him while Scarface listened. He could repeat every word.

"I have taught thee to read, Peter, and in all the years since I found thee in the taiga thou hast never broken a trust."

"No, Barin."

"And thou wilt go with Boris Evanovich and serve him as thou hast served me?"

"Yes, Barin."

"In everything thou wilt serve?"

"Yes, Barin."

"Thou wilt tell no one his business? *No one. Not anyone at all.* . . . Is it understood?"

"Yes, Barin."

"Thou wilt be gone for two years—perhaps three, Petroushka!"

"It will be lonely, Barin."

"Dost thou still want to go?"

"Yes, Barin, for he has promised to send me to school."

And, at the end, the Foreigner had shaken hands with him in the manner of grown men. Even now, an hour afterward, he swallowed hard as he thought of it. And it was then that the great thought had come to him and had sent him hot-foot to Feenga; he needed her help.

He puzzled a little over Feenga. She was a girl, and therefore unreliable—or so it seemed—with her laugh-

ter, and her teasing, and her queer little moments of sulkiness when she looked at him and would not speak. But then she did wear his handkerchief . . . and she was willing to be beaten because of him. He would be lonely without Feenga . . . but if one were to be educated——

Suddenly he lost his balance and disappeared backward over the gate. There was a brief struggle, some suppressed laughter, and then Feenga's voice whispering excitedly.

"I crossed myself three times, Petroushka, and thou hast not told!"

But in the interval Peter had discovered that makers of maps did not tell! He temporized.

"Has she beaten thee?"

Feenga laughed. "She is afraid for her pigs. But she will when thou art gone."

Peter swore. "The old Sow! . . ."

It only made Feenga giggle happily, and she snuggled comfortably against him ready for a long chat. "I have crossed myself three times!" she reiterated. And with her hair tickling his ear Peter searched the heavens for a suitable lie.

When none came to him, he resorted to a part of the truth.

"The Foreigner has said that I am to go to school. One may be away for a long time."

Feenga jerked upright. "To school! . . . To be an educated one? . . ." The queer little moment of sulkiness came to her face. "Petroushka . . . and I—I will still be the herder of pigs." She slumped away, her face

hidden. But somehow he moved so that she snuggled against him instead; and thus, with her hair once more tickling his ear, he plunged as close to his secret as he dared.

"It is the Stranger—Scarface. He came searching for a guide. It was said that I was a hishnik's son, born in the taiga; they talked of it, and the Foreigner ordered me to go."

"Where did he order thee to go?" Feenga demanded.

"Into the taiga, so much is plain," Peter evaded. "But in what direction?—Who am I to ask such a thing?"

Feenga's imagination grappled with the problem. "He is a hishnik," she decided, "therefore he will say nothing."

"He is a well-born," Peter corrected. "Such a one goes where he chooses, and I go with him because he has promised to send me to school."

Feenga seized on the last point.

"*He* has promised to send thee to school?—But thou art nothing to him."

Peter had considered this point himself, and had settled it his own way. "Look you! In all the taiga there is not one other hishnik's son who can read out of a book. To a well-born such things are of importance. He has not promised to send *thee* to school."

Feenga resented the implied inferiority and dealt with it promptly. "Reading out of a book has not given thee a better nose, Petroushka, but if thy school would do such a thing——"

"What a thing it is to be a girl!" Peter interrupted disgustedly. His arm went round her neck to strangle

her into proper submission, but ended by giving a creditable hug, for after all she was only a girl, and he needed her. "Feenga, little one, I have a great thought for thee. If the Foreigner were to take thee to Davenda? . . ."

Feenga took a long breath; whereupon he rushed recklessly on: "Thy Baba beats thee, and I do not choose—therefore have I thought of this thing!" He scrambled to his feet and pulled her up after him: "Come, we will find him in the guest house." In his eagerness he was already climbing the gate.

But Feenga stopped him. "He is a great Barin. One is afraid!"

Peter tried to be patient. "Have I not said that it is I who will speak to him?"

She still hung back. "One is afraid!"

Peter's nose lifted. "A girl who minds pigs!—Bah!"

The insult held the silence while they looked at each other, then Feenga slapped him in the face and, before he could move or retaliate, his handkerchief was in the dirt; but somehow Peter got hold of her and, before he knew it, had kissed her on the mouth.

Feenga recovered first. For a breathless second she looked at him sideways—then she picked up her handkerchief and clambered over the gate. Peter followed.

They walked in silence to the guest house, and entered the yard. Here Peter pulled up. "Listen, Feenga! Thou wilt run messages for the Foreigner, and bring his boots, and thou wilt carry water for Anna Mihaelovna, and do other things that she requires, and when the lit-

tle Mischa is asleep thou wilt keep the flies from settling on his nose, and thou wilt——"

Feenga stopped him impatiently—such details were nothing to her. "Will Anna Mihaelovna teach me to read out of a book?"

Peter regarded her in silence, then heaved a great sigh. Here, then, was one who was not content to be a herder of pigs! . . . Such a one would understand as though she were a boy! . . . It justified his faith, and best of all it made it possible to unburden his heart of a difficulty that had troubled him from the moment that he knew he was to go.

"Feenga—my Barin is a foreigner, and a great one, but with all his learning he is ignorant of little things. Thou wilt care for him until I come back?"

She nodded with such complete understanding that, without another word, he led her into the presence of the man who had taught him to read.

CHAPTER VI
MAP MAKING

THEY left Gorbitza during the night. Boris Evanovich and Peter, leading a pack horse without bells. No one was on hand to say good-bye, for the Foreigner and Feenga were already halfway to Davenda, and Gorbitza was uninterested and therefore asleep.

Orlof congratulated himself. The first step toward building the all-Russian railroad appeared to have been taken without a rumor, as His Excellency had so greatly desired.

Peter rode in the lead, as a matter of right. Was he not the guide? It suited the outlaw strain in his blood that his new Barin wished to go secretly at night; in such a case they could more likely avoid officials. But if they should chance on one they could lie; lying to officials, even when it was not exactly necessary for safety, was an old story to the son of Franz the hishnik. He turned off the main street into Chinatown, which afforded a convenient and twisty lane by which to reach the trail into the willows and thereby avoid the wagon road and the bridge.

The door of the last hut but one was open, and in the lighted interior a Chinaman sat at a table writing. Peter did not appear to notice him, but the Chinaman, as they crossed the shaft of light not more than three feet from

his doorpost, took in every detail of their equipment and their horses, and did not stir until the sound of their going had died away into the willows. Then he reached out an arm and shut the door.

It was Ne Ah Bo, the peddler. He was still writing when Peter forded the Gorbitza stream for the last time before the ranges swallowed them up.

On the fourth evening they camped below timber line on the upper slopes of Grassy Mountain, and next morning they climbed to the top. It gave them a clear outlook over three extensive river systems, and it gave Peter his first practical lesson in the making of a map.

Long ago the Foreigner had introduced him to a compass. With it one recorded the direction of streams, and for years whenever he could manage to do so he had carried Stepan Stepanovich's second-best compass on his belt. It was most useful to mystify mujiks who could not read, and he valued it more even than he valued anything else he possessed.

And now there was a new instrument which excited him greatly, one with a curious name which explained how high one had climbed. Boris Evanovich had two of them —aneroids, he called them—and he, Peter, carried the smaller one on his belt. He was proud of the honor and was only sorry that Feenga was not there to admire; but he would explain it all to her later on. Meanwhile, he took compass bearings of the mountains, tapped the aneroid in the approved manner, filled his pockets with pine nuts, and in various ways kept himself interested during the morning, while Boris Evanovich wrote endlessly in his notebook.

He was inclined to be patient and a little superior because the country was so very familiar to him. There was the White River running a hundred versts to the west, with one great tributary to the north almost as far as Nerchinsk—he had never been to Nerchinsk, but it was the summer trail for haymakers as every mujik would know—and behind them was the Amazar; and over his shoulder, Davenda, with the top of Cloudy Peak showing clearly over the Divide.

But when Boris Evanovich began to make a picture, filling in square after square of the green-lined paper in his notebook, Peter forgot to feel superior. Gospodi! but this was marvelous! The trail they had traveled from Gorbitza! It came alive right under his nose, wound round the side of Bald Head Mountain, dropped to Sable Creek—with an arrow to show which way it ran—and from there it climbed, with many twistings, on to the Divide and back again into the Gorbitza country until it stopped just above timber line on Grassy Mountain, where they were sitting now with the big new compass set up proudly on a stand beside them.

Boris Evanovich worked rapidly. One after another he took bearings of the hilltops and plotted them, adding arrows and figures and a whole forest of stark little notes speaking of bogs, and soil, and rocks; and even information about trees; and open country; and hayfields; and pasture for horses. It was amazing!

But as it grew, square by square, under Peter's very eyes, he began to feel more than a little aghast. Such a man would quickly learn the country as intimately as a gold thief, would even be able by the aid of this square-

lined paper to tell others a great many things that it would be better they should not know—and if it were to fall into the hands of officials . . .

He had not thought of things such as these before.

"Barin," he said quietly, so as not to interrupt unduly a marginal sketch of Cloudy Peak—"Barin, they will of a certainty cut our throats!"

Orlof's pencil stopped for a breathing space only. "Who will cut our throats, Peter?"

"The hishniks, Barin, and those who do not like to pay taxes. With such a paper anyone who understood could go easily from place to place."

Orlof looked critically at the map. "If we do not speak of it they will not know."

Peter shook his head impatiently. "Do not fear, Barin, the taiga will find out. One must be ready with a proper lie; for if they think of thee as an official——" He paused, stumbling suddenly onto a very uncomfortable thought. "Barin, whom dost thou serve?"

Orlof returned without hurry to his sketch. "Whom does one serve, Peter? How shall one say? Maps are necessary for schools, and schools are necessary that Russia may be strong. In the end one seems to serve Russia."

The sketch was finished and the paper was folded away, and as Peter still said nothing, Boris Evanovich spoke more of his thought—spoke so quietly that it seemed important to listen to what he said.

"In the beginning, Peter, there was nothing but taiga. But there came a time when hunters appeared, searching after game; after them came hishniks; then haymakers;

and after the haymakers a village or two, for people are always hungry and only villages can grow food. But with the villages came families, and so, little by little, wagon roads were built; and wagon roads brought more families, and more people; and more people brought more trade. And in time trade brings the railroad, and the railroad breeds cities, as great or even greater than Chita; and where there are cities there must be laws because people quarrel. And where there are laws there must be officials to see that the laws are obeyed. And when the story is all told perhaps each one, in his own way, helps a little to make Russia strong. These things have happened in Siberia just as I have told them, over and over again, as thou wilt learn when thou dost go to school."

Peter puzzled the thing out in his own way. "If a hishnik finds gold in a new place he digs wherever he likes and there is no one to stop him, and when another comes he too works in his own place. But when twenty come, in a little while they all crowd into the richest spots. Then there is fighting. So the wisest ones among them set up a committee to stop quarreling. My father was such a man, Barin. Those who persist in fighting are driven out, or —well, there are plenty of pits into which a corpse can be thrown. Corpses do not fight!"

Orlof nodded. "That is interesting. Among the hishniks, then, thy father was somewhat of an official. Is it not so?"

Peter frowned. "Not at all, Barin. Officials are sent by the Governor. They wear a uniform and they interfere with honest men; if one of them were to see thee making

a map he would question thee and, without doubt, he would take it away."

"Then we will avoid all officials!" Orlof decided. "And now we will eat a little; and then we will search for a pass, for such things must be carefully written down if one's map is to speak the truth."

Peter pointed across the shoulder of the mountain. "In that direction there is a place where a loaded sledge can go in winter. It is also a good place to snare rabbits."

"Then we will go there," Orlof answered.

They traveled west, for Boris Evanovich was searching for a pass which would open a way toward Nerchinsk. When he found it, he doubled back. Presently they descended into the country of the Amazar and, thereafter, got caught in the bogs and the unfordable stretches of the middle river.

They were still traveling outside the gold fields proper and consequently hishniks were scarce. Even so, Orlof, being unwilling to arouse curiosity, sent Peter alone into the occasional settlement for supplies. For the most part they lived on game, so that bread was an acceptable addition; and no Russian is willing, short of necessity, to go without tea.

In each village Peter invented his own tale. If he had with him the pelts of some fur-bearing animal he had shot, he would trade them for supplies. If not, he belonged to the haymakers; or let it be assumed that a band of hishniks was on the trail. In the taiga questions about hishniks could go unanswered without arousing suspicion.

Once he returned empty-handed and obviously upset.

He had seen a Cossack who belonged to the official headquarters in the Amazar.

"Tea and bread are greatly to be desired, Barin," he explained, "but Cossacks have eyes in their horses' tails. To such a one a tale of haymakers would be to laugh. Therefore we must eat rabbits without bread, though in the bottom of the sack there is still a very little for thee. And Barin, if thou wilt permit such a thing, we will travel at night until we have left the Post behind."

"One cannot map the country at night," Orlof pointed out.

But Peter dismissed the objection. "That may well be, Barin, but do I not know that all Cossacks who serve at the Post are sons of Kara convicts!—They spy into one's saddlebags and on occasion steal one's horses. It is better for thy map that we go at night."

He was so insistent that Orlof left his work on the middle river, and for three days and nights the boy's sure instinct was their only guide, for he plunged into the maze of foothills that surrounded the official headquarters of the Amazar, and refused to make use of the hishnik trails.

"Barin, we have neither picks nor shovels, therefore would hishniks spit at us; and what kind of haymakers would we appear without scythes? Even hunters carry much ammunition, and ours is all but gone. What is one to do?"

"What indeed?" queried Orlof, more because he wanted to hear Peter's solution than because he feared that the officials in the Amazar would interfere with him.

"One must travel at night, Barin. It will be slow, but there is a moon and we have eyes. When thy map needs a lookout thou canst climb to the top of a hill, but it is best that I watch the horses for without horses we are as lame men."

And they carried this program through.

Each day Orlof climbed to some lookout while Peter stayed behind with the horses. Once while doing so he caught sight of His Excellency's official Amazar headquarters, protected by its high stockade.

When it was necessary for Peter to snare rabbits for food he insisted that Boris Evanovich do sentry-go in his absence, and only when he considered that the danger zone was passed did he call a fresh conference over their evening meal.

"Barin, near us there is a low place in the hills by which we can leave the Amazar behind. It will bring us into the country of small rivers which is known only to gold thieves."

Orlof referred to the large colored map that had first roused Peter's wonder. "That appears to be true," he said. "And beyond the small rivers are the headwaters of the Zeya. When we have followed the Zeya to its mouth our work will be done."

Peter examined the map for a long time. "It is a mighty river, Barin. One has never seen it but one has heard talk of such a thing."

"Can one find the way through the country of small rivers?"

"Hishniks go everywhere, Barin!" Peter spoke

proudly. "Into the country of small rivers—into the Zeya country—south to the Hun Hoosa—it is all one! Only is it necessary that there be gold. Such people do not require a map, they talk one to the other, and it will be for us to listen to their talk. Once we have left the Amazar behind it is well that we go into their camps and, on occasion, drink vodka and wash a little gold; and also we must hide thy maps and thy money in our clothes, and it must in nowise be discovered that I can read. To do these things safely we must carry a pick and shovel, and a latok."

"Where can one get such things?" Orlof asked.

Peter chewed a rabbit's leg while he considered. "One might steal them, Barin, or if it is so ordered one can buy them. There is a Chinese contractor in the last gold camp at the head of the Amazar, to be reached in an hour or two if one leads a pack horse. It will be wise to go on foot."

"If there is a Cossack there from the Post, will he not ask questions?" Orlof suggested.

Peter grinned, and it was obvious that the uneasiness of the last few days had disappeared. "In such a camp a Cossack is always drunk, Barin. Also the contractor was known to my father, and thinking that I am with gold thieves he will ask nothing at all, he will wish me to go quickly before I am seen. Perhaps it will not be necessary to give money for that which we need."

"I see!" said Boris Evanovich. "Then, if you are willing to go . . ."

Peter attacked the remains of the rabbit. "To-night we will make a place for thy map where it will not be easily

found. As for the contractor, he shall give me tea and a great deal of dried bread, and much ammunition, and in the evening I shall return. And Barin, it will be well that thou dost not shave off thy beard . . . there is the scar on thy face! People in the taiga remember such things."

CHAPTER VII

THE MARK OF THE TRAVELER

AN HOUR or so after dawn, while it was still too early for the contractor's men to be at work, Peter, leading a pack horse, reached the edge of the standing timber, where he gained a clear view of some winter workings a good mile or more above the camp.

He knew they were winter workings by the battered headgear that leaned drunkenly beside each tumbled-in shaft, and as he had been familiar with such things from childhood he knew that they had been temporarily abandoned, because only when the gravel was frozen could one work at the bottom of these shafts.

He tethered his horse some distance back in the timber, and began a systematic exploration of the confusion of tailing dumps and refuse that covered the bottom of the stream. But to him there appeared no confusion at all, for every foot of the ground was as plain as the open pages of a book.

Close to each tumbled-in shaft was a circular basin scooped out of the ground. In these they had washed all their gold. The sides and bottoms still showed evidence that they had been carefully plastered with clay to make them water-tight. Some of them still held water and, as often as he found one such, he prodded into its muddy depths with a stick. When he had examined perhaps a

dozen, he discovered one fully three times as large as the rest, and by the refuse of fine sand and gravel thrown out it was evident that here a great deal of work had been done. Close to the basin were the remains of a shelter, evidences of a fire, and odds and ends of clothing and sacks.

Here, then, was a rich spot where a number of men had worked.

Peter looked it over with a practised eye. Right at his feet was an old shovel handle. He picked it up and balanced it critically, then used it to turn over the refuse.

In less than a minute he had found a shovel which, though badly worn, was good enough to use. He looked it over almost reverently, spat on it for luck, and, when he had fitted the handle, kicked off his shoepacks, pulled his baggy trousers over his knees, and waded into the pool.

He now began a thorough investigation. For many minutes he found nothing more exciting than heavy black sand and clay, and then with a grunt of deepest satisfaction he brought to the surface a shallow, oval-shaped wooden dish, used by hishniks and contractors alike for panning gold. All through the taiga it was known as a latok.

This was a real find, and Peter wiped it far more carefully than he had ever wiped his face.

It was a good latok, without even a crack. It made him feel an honest craftsman again, one who could face his world without the vague feeling of guilt that had plagued him as he moved from hilltop to hilltop with his new Barin.

How could one explain to honest mujiks that one was making a *map?* But with a shovel and a latok—and a pick, when one could come by one—a man would appear a respectable hishnik, who worked at a recognized trade.

"Now if one could find a pick——" he told his reflection in the pool, and once more he fell to dredging, but this time without results.

"Then one must certainly steal one!" he decided. For as he saw the future, to go into the country of small rivers without proper equipment was to court disaster from the start.

He returned to his pack horse and followed a trail that brought him out at the back of the contractor's corral. Here, he again tethered his horse out of sight, in a clump of saplings.

He took his empty bread sacks and entered the camp on foot.

All contractors' camps were constructed alike. A storehouse, in one end of which the contractor lived, set in the middle of an irregular space, with a dozen or more less pretentious huts grouped about it wherever a convenient spot might be found. No attempt at order and nothing in the nature of a street. Convenient if one wished to take cover quickly, but awkward if one came upon it for the first time at night.

It suited Peter's instinct for privacy, and he dodged from the shelter of one hut to another much as a cat will hug the furniture in a strange room. When he came in sight of the store he stopped to scrutinize the terrain. If Cossacks from the Post should be in camp their horses

would be tethered to the hitching post not far from the scales.

But nothing was in sight, save only a Chinaman who used the scales as a seat. Peter marched straight up to him.

"Where will one find the contractor, Sleepy-head?" he began. Then he recognized the peddler, Ne Ah Bo, who at the time the ice went out had given him a lift to Gorbitza.

He gave him his friendliest grin. "Is it thee once again? And hast thou already emptied thy packs?"

The peddler's eyes rested for the fraction of a second on the boy's face, then dropped to his shoepacks which were smeared with bedrock clay and specks of black sand. "Thou wilt find him in his house," he said, "and the Chenovnik and the Cossacks will be here at noon to carry away the gold." He spoke as though such things were of no interest to him, and Peter, after a quick glance at the sun, left him to his thoughts.

The contractor was busy with his clean-up and not anxious to be disturbed. Nonetheless Peter planted himself squarely, and stated his needs.

"Two sacks of dried bread are necessary, and enough ammunition to fill two belts."

The contractor stopped only long enough to look him over. "The Cossacks are on the way—they will supply thee with bread for a long time."

Peter moved closer. "The son of Franz the hishnik speaks to thee."

The contractor stopped work and looked him all over again. There was recognition but no friendliness. "For a

long time the son of Franz has lived with the Foreigner," he growled.

Peter achieved a creditable shrug of weariness. "One has tired of such service!" And then in a confidential undertone he added: "I will pay money for bread."

It had the opposite effect to the one he had hoped.

"If thou hast money it was stolen from the Foreigner!" The contractor showed fear and haste to be rid of him. "Who am I to mix into the Foreigner's affairs? If thou art not gone, I will tell thy story to the Cossacks from the Post." He pointed to the door.

Peter however stood his ground. "A hishnik talks to thee and thou art afraid?—Such a thing will be remembered." In his angry contempt he was about to say more but, just then, Ne Ah Bo walked into the room. "What will be remembered?" he asked, looking down at him.

Peter's anger exploded. "Tf-oo-ee! All Asiats are polecats. One asks for a little bread and he talks of Cossacks."

The peddler sat down, and Peter pushed past him and went out on the porch. Abuse was pleasant when one was in a rage, but something would have to be done . . . his Barin's map was unfinished and to go farther without supplies would be plainly foolish. He stared hard at the empty sack. How to fill it with bread? . . .

Behind him, Ne Ah Bo turned noiselessly toward the table. He held in the open palm of his hand a short ebony joss stick, in the center of which was engraved a single Chinese character in gold. The contractor saw it and fear came into his eyes.

"One obeys quickly," he whispered, and his teeth seemed to chatter a little over the words.

Ne Ah Bo nodded. "The Traveler sends word," he said quietly. "The boy's sacks are to be filled."

Peter, discussing the matter with Boris Evanovich that night, accounted for the sudden change of heart according to his own fashion. "Hishniks are little thieves, Barin, but officials are great ones, and between them the contractor sups with the devil in Lent, therefore in the end it was wiser to sell me the bread."

He had forgotten the existence of Ne Ah Bo, for the Chinese peddler was less to him than the pick which he had found by the contractor's corral.

CHAPTER VIII

SMOKE

PETER kicked aside the saddle blankets and sat up, listening for horse bells. It was only half daylight and he was sleepy. The steady beating of raindrops on the slabs of bark over his head seemed to fill the taiga with its drip. Beyond the embers of last night's fire, three pale sentinels stared at him from out of the forest—the three larch trees whose bark he had stripped to build the shelter under which they slept.

Behind the sentinels, a thicket of alders wrapped itself in a cobweb of mist; beyond the alders darkness still clung with blue intensity to the scarcely visible outline of the range.

Peter forgot about horse bells. He drew his knees up under his chin and soaked in the dripping loneliness of it all. He loved every bit of it, with fierceness—a fierceness that sprang from the depths of his soul. Even the smell of his saddle blanket pleased him. The very dampness and the dripping chill of such a daybreak belonged to the taiga, which was his from the beginning. It was cold enough to make him shiver, but even so the beauty of it affected him like a sunrise. A sunrise that marched across the hills, flashing its warmth and its colors valiantly . . . like Feenga's handkerchief when she skipped across the litter of the Old One's corral.

To Peter, rain or shine, the taiga was the taiga, big, tremendous, lonely. Yet, while one ached to be in the midst of it, most amazingly one ached still more to go to school! Which, of a certainty, would be to leave it behind.

Such tangled thoughts gave him a feeling behind his stomach which he did not enjoy. He began to wind the strips of blanket which he used for socks round his feet. These difficult thoughts had begun for him when the Foreigner had taught him to read. The Foreigner was a great man who would, in the end, return to his own country, and it had been Peter's secret ambition to be worthy to go with him.

But that was before Boris Evanovich had taught him to make maps. Boris Evanovich was a great man also, not a foreigner, but one who had talked quietly to him over the fire about Russia—their common country—as though such things came from the deepest places in his heart.

When the peasants were no longer ignorant Russia would be strong, therefore Russia must have schools. . . .

Suddenly Peter's winding ceased, and he turned to stare at Boris Evanovich. Through the dripping of the rain an idea had come to him—an idea that had sprung full-born out of what his new Barin had said to him.

If such a thing were true, then those who were educated had accepted a trust . . . they must help to make Russia strong. . . .

That he, Peter, son of Franz the hishnik, could help to make Russia strong was a thought too big for him;

he grinned because his jaw hurt him—and then because he was thinking of a trust, he moved Orlof's notebook under a saddle lest it get wet.

The touch of the cold leather against his wrist jerked his attention back to practical things, and brought him scrambling to his knees, listening intently.

The horses!—He had been awake five minutes now, and had not heard their bells. The dripping of the rain reminded him that, notoriously, horses strayed when it was wet. He was out of the shelter, pulling the saddle blanket round his shoulders like a poncho, before a dozen more raindrops could reach the ground.

Wasting time thinking thoughts about Russia when the horses had strayed! Most assuredly horses were his trust. He grinned again at his foolishness, and was gone into the fog.

It was ten minutes after he disappeared that Orlof was disturbed by a runnel of water dripping into his ear. He too sat up and hugged his knees while he stared sleepily at the three freshly barked trees. It was much lighter now; the alder thicket was no longer cobwebbed in mist, and, beyond, the skyline was clear behind its paneling of rain.

Like Peter, Boris Evanovich looked to the safety of his notebook, then moved the bread sacks to a drier spot. But, unlike Peter, he had no musings about Russia's future to take his attention from practical things, so after looking casually at the aneroid he unearthed some dry kindling from Peter's bed.

While waiting for the kettle to boil, he opened the

notebook and frowned at a page. This country of small rivers bothered him more than he chose to admit.

The two big river systems behind him offered no especial problem to a railroad builder, because there were low passes, and river bottoms with plenty of room to swing the line in any direction that detailed surveys might decide. But the moment they had crossed the Amazar watershed they had plunged into broken country as bad as the taiga that surrounded Gorbitza and Cloudy Peak and extended for hundreds of versts down the course of the Amur. To drive a railroad through such a maze of crooked canyons and hog-backed ridges as now surrounded him, would mean rock work and tunnels and endless expense and delays; and these must somehow be avoided if His Excellency was to be satisfied with his report. For where he thought of tunnels the Governor would think of taxes, and of the hazards of administration in a province already made rebellious by the losses and privations of war.

Night after night he had lain in his blankets thinking over his talk with the Governor. "Three hundred millions for construction. . . . And we must feed the jackals in Petersburg—shall we say another hundred million or so? And who will be asked to pay? I do not like your railroad, Boris Evanovich, and yet in the end one sees it will have to be built." Without doubt, when they met in August, His Excellency must be satisfied with the preliminary surveys or there would be opposition.

And just as Peter longed for education, so Boris Evanovich longed for his dream of an all-Russian road to the sea. Until it was achieved his work was not done.

"We must seek open country to the north!" he decided; and he looked about for Peter as though he were anxious to start at once.

It was half an hour before the boy appeared, soaked to the waist. "The horses are gone, Barin!" he said simply. "They strayed early in the night. I have followed their tracks for a verst."

Orlof poured him some tea. "Are they heading back to the Amazar?—I do not wish to be delayed in this crazy-quilt of hills."

"No, Barin, they are crossing the high range toward the north and they will travel fast while it rains. I go as soon as I have eaten some bread. One does not know when one will be back."

Orlof tapped the aneroid. "The rain will stop in an hour."

An aneroid was, of course, a wonderful thing, but Peter preferred to examine the clouds. "Perhaps it will," he said unhopefully, and then, with his mouth full of bread, he remarked: "It is Peter's Day and the saying is that if it rains on Peter's Day there will be good hay."

Orlof took no interest in the hay crop. "I shall climb the high hill to the south, and if I am not back when thou dost return, do not come to look for me. Get some rest and to-morrow we will make a long march."

"To the north there are many hishniks, Barin. One heard talk of it in the contractor's camp."

"Why dost thou remember such a thing now?"

"The horses have strayed in that direction and the hishinks may find them. It is well to avoid hishniks if one wishes to make a long march."

"Thy talk is always of hishniks. Art thou then afraid?" Orlof's voice showed a trace of impatience.

"But, Barin, if we meet hishniks it will be necessary that we stop a little and make a pretense of work, for in the country of small rivers only hishniks and peddlers are allowed to go free. We have no goods, Barin, with which to trade, and if we do not dig like the rest it will be thought we are officials who have come to spy. In such a case it will not be long before our throats are cut."

But Boris Evanovich had already turned back to his notes, so Peter finished his bread in silence and set out up the hill, his shoepacks moving over the ground with the shuffling peasant's gait which, for all its apparent slowness, covers long distances in a day.

The spoor was easy to follow for the ground was soaked, and trailing horses was an old story with Peter.

The hillside gave out on the shoulder of a high spur, where a patch of mountain grass showed signs that the horses had stopped to graze. From there the tracks led downhill again into a valley which headed toward the north.

Peter did not follow them directly, he turned off to the right, led by the instinct of a hishnik toward a point whence he could get a wide view. He was looking for smoke—and he found it at the first glance: far down the valley, a thin gray line trailing close to the tree tops.

He grunted as though none too pleased, and scorning anything so unnecessary as a compass, marked it in his memory with the accuracy of a wolf. Before he turned away he noted the sweep of the hills beyond the smoke, observing that they opened out into easier country ahead.

He would speak of it to Boris Evanovich when he returned.

With scarcely a minute's loss he plunged downward into the brush to pick up his trail once more, and having done so followed it relentlessly, not any longer with the gait of a peasant but running and sliding and scrambling through the deep timber, headed unswervingly for the smoke; for smoke to him meant hishniks, and, in spite of Orlof's indifference, he knew that the way of hishniks with stray horses—or with strangers who might happen upon their camps in the wilds—was not a thing to be dismissed with a shrug.

At the end of an hour he came to a trail. It gave him pause only long enough to satisfy himself that the horses had not doubled back toward the Amazar. Then he was off again at his steady dog-trot.

It was about noon that he came to a small pasture not far from the stream, and here, grazing not fifty yards ahead of him, were the horses.

"*Tf-oo-ee! My dear ones!*" he announced with deep feeling. "There thou art—stuffing thy bellies with fresh grass! Nonetheless——"

But his sarcasm was arrested in full flight, for on the other side of the meadow he caught sight of a number of trees from which the bark had been freshly peeled.

Instantly his manner changed to extreme caution. If he could but herd the horses back into the standing timber before he was seen . . . While he was uncoiling the halters which he carried round his waist, he bethought him again that it was Peter's Day and breathed more

freely, for even a gold thief would not work on Peter's Day. Moreover, if there was vodka they would be drunk, and drunken men made poor watchmen. Whereupon he stepped boldly out into the pasture to round up the horses, and had actually roped the last of them when a man carrying a gun, and with a kinjal in his belt, came toward him from the lower end of the glade.

He waited—there was nothing else to do. When the man came close enough he looked at his boots; they were covered with bedrock clay.

The newcomer noted his interest in his footgear and it served as an introduction between them. "One half-grown hishnik brat, and three horses!" he remarked casually. "Where are the rest of the gang?"

Peter waved an arm toward the ranges behind him. "There are but two of us; one wants only a little corner to dig."

For answer the man moved closer to the horses. "Tell thy father to come," he remarked dryly. "We will talk of it when he is here."

Peter understood perfectly. The horses would be kept as hostages for his return. He handed over two of the headlines. "There are our bread and tools, and my father is hunting; if his saint is good there may be a buck."

The man took the remaining rope away from him. "Carry thy bread on thy back, and what thou canst not carry thou wilt fetch when we have talked a little."

Peter temporized. "And thou wilt give my father a place to dig?"

"Von——!" The man spat angrily. And Peter recognized defeat.

When Orlof returned to camp he found the boy dozing over the fire, but, characteristically, it was to the map and not to the horses that his first remark had reference.

"There is interesting country to the north. I also have been a long way since morning. To-morrow we will go!"

Peter sighed. "Barin, we go on foot, for hishniks have taken our horses, and there is nothing to do."

Orlof listened to his tale with surprising indifference. "If we are clever enough," he remarked thoughtfully, "such men can tell us a great deal that will be useful for our map. It was because I foresaw some such adventure that I was willing to have thee come; thou hast gold thieving in thy blood, little man. For a while, then, thou canst dig, and I—if I understand thy tale—am thy father who loves to hunt deer. What more could a maker of maps desire?"

Peter scratched his head doubtfully. "Barin, thou dost not know hishniks' talk, and thou canst not use a latok."

Orlof laughed. "Thou canst sleep soundly! I worked with gold thieves in the Altai before thou wert born. A maker of maps turns his hand to many trades."

Peter crossed himself, for now he knew beyond all question that his new Barin was a great man.

CHAPTER IX

HISHNIKS

THE scene that greeted Boris Evanovich and Peter when they tramped into the hishniks' camp about noon next day, intent on the recovery of their horses, was familiar to Peter in every detail of its wild disorder. Rough bark shelters, dotted about above the stream wherever there was room for a man to lie down; beds of dirty pine branches; a common fireplace; a primitive makeshift for a blacksmith's shop; many lengths of peeled bark, curled in half circles, to be used later as a flume. . . . No attempt at order, and no sanitation.

The place was littered with refuse, and already infested with mosquitoes and the large horsefly which, after Peter's Day, makes life in such places a burden.

The first discovery had evidently been made at the head of a bend where the valley narrowed to a little canyon. Here was a flat spot in the stream, with shallow gravel, and uneven bedrock which acted as natural riffles to catch the gold. It was an ideal spot for hishniks, who worked with the most primitive of tools, for no extensive removal of surface dirt was necessary in order to get at the paystreak below.

A score of men were at work, each one in his own excavation and quite regardless of his neighbor's plans, and as there was no system or coöperation there was little

attempt at drainage, and half of the miners worked up to their knees in sludge, while the stream, which had been turned aside into a hastily constructed ditch, threatened to break through in a number of places and flood the whole works.

Over all, the busy tang of shovels against rock, and the *grit, grit* of gravel in the latoks as they panned out the heavy dirt above bedrock, caroled in Peter's ears like a well-loved holiday song. His feet shuffled with impatience. "Barin, of a certainty we can find a place to dig!" He slipped his pack and began to unsling his pick and shovel, and the precious latok which he had been at such pains to bring through from the Amazar unbroken.

Orlof continued to survey the disorder of the scene, and all his engineering training rose in revolt. "Wild dogs!" he growled. "Look at them, Peter! If they were to work for even one whole day together under proper supervision they could complete a drain, and with a string of sluice boxes the whole flat could be washed in a season. As it is, they waste many times more than they save."

Peter looked disturbed. "Barin, thou must not talk of such things here!" And then his practised eye ranged once more over the confusion. "In a week they will begin to fight, Barin. Then we must set up a committee. One or two strong men. Perhaps there will be a killing." He seemed to find the prospect exciting, but he got no response from Orlof. With a doubtful glance at his face he went on: "Before the killing begins, Barin, if our saints are good to us, our pockets will be full of gold."

Orlof grunted. "Well, let's have a stomach full of food

at once. Make up the fire and cook the rabchick we shot, and as soon as we have located the horses we will see what we can do."

Peter stood his ground. "When we have eaten a little we must dig, or we will have no use for horses at all. And Barin, as they suppose thou art my father, while I boil the kettle thou must search out a place where we can work. Afterward when it is dark we can mention the horses. Hishniks do not keep their animals where they can be found."

Orlof said nothing. He suspected, from rumors that filtered out of the taiga, that what Peter said was true. A successful raid by officials was apt to be a pretty thoroughgoing affair. They would confiscate the gold, little of which, however, found its way into the hands of the government, steal the hishniks' horses when they could find them, and if there was resistance shoot men down, while those whom they spared they would drive into the taiga, often without food and sometimes without boots. Orlof did not doubt that such things had happened many times in the history of the gold fields. Officials, like other men, could be brutal when angry or when a great deal of loot was in sight, and at times the gold thieves washed an astonishing amount of gold. However, official severity was not the whole story; if the hishniks were strong enough, officials fared even worse. Very few of them ever returned.

A noise behind him caused Orlof to look round. Half-a-dozen men were coming toward them from the direction of the cut; they all carried guns. At a safe distance they stopped to parley, a heavily bearded man, the one

who had talked to Peter, stepping a pace to the front of the rest.

"So here is the other one come to talk of horses!" His voice was not in the least friendly and he carried his rifle menacingly ready for use.

Orlof leaned his own against a stump. "The horses can wait," he said, "until we are better acquainted. One has come to ask for a little place to dig."

Without any more talk the hishniks closed in. Orlof began to roll a cigarette and Peter went on plucking a rabchick. Presently the latter remarked conversationally: "Father, one will need another latok!"

The bearded man kicked at the one Peter had brought. "It is a good enough one!" he said, and his voice was more friendly. The sight of their tools seemed to have reassured him.

Someone in the crowd laughed. "They are nothing but poor ones like the rest of us! Give them a place."

Peter wiped his nose on his sleeve and a rabchick feather stuck to his cheek. He left it there and went on with his work.

Orlof offered the speaker his hand. "Shake on that, brother mujik," he said easily. "One has a little vodka with which to buy our footing! Where hast thou put the vodka, young one?"

Peter removed the feather while he appeared to think. "If thou didst not drink it all on Peter's Day it is where we left our packs."

Someone laughed again and the last speaker among them pulled the bearded man by the arm. "Osep, we waste time!"

Osep nodded, and the group began to break up. Osep waited until they were out of earshot to remark: "I will show thee the horses, but thou wert a fool to talk of the vodka. If thou hadst kept thy tongue quiet the two of us could have got decently drunk."

Orlof looked his sympathy. "That is so, but in such a case what is one to do?"

Osep swaggered. "Let me but touch thy bottle first and I will show these lousy thieves who is boss!"

Peter looked at him sideways. In such places there was always one to make trouble. He wiped his nose again and began to clean the second bird.

By evening, Boris Evanovich and Peter between them had sunk a hole down to pay dirt large enough for one man to work, and in the comparative privacy of their pit Orlof outlined his plan of campaign to the boy.

"To-morrow I go for what remains of our packs, and to-night, over the fire, it shall be said that our bread is so nearly finished that one of us must hunt. By this means I will search the country to the north, and when the map is ready we will slip away."

Peter seemed hardly to listen he was so interested in testing his first latok of dirt.

"Barin," he muttered hoarsely, "Barin—look at it. When we come to real bedrock it will be rich enough to cause a fight. Of a certainty we must make a second latok for thee."

Orlof looked cryptically at Peter, rather than at the gold in the pan. The boy had gone hishnik!—the map was for the moment nothing at all.

"Peter," he said definitely, "in four days or possibly five we will be ready to go."

The boy sat back on his heels. "But Barin, we cannot go. Look at it! In a month, if God is good, we will have riches. Think of such a thing, Barin."

Orlof dropped on his heels so that he could talk still more privately, and for a moment or two he let his fingers play with the glittering colors in the pan. "In a month, if God is good to thee, thou wilt be on thy way to school!"

Peter lowered his head for a long minute, while the uncomfortable feeling which always possessed him whenever he thought of leaving the taiga swept over him with redoubled force, and only faintly, amidst the gritting of many shovels, came the echo of those things of which Boris Evanovich spoke. The two thoughts coming together always disturbed him, but now the rough surface of the latok against his muddy fingers seemed to supply all the answer that anyone could demand. Russia was a mystery too remote, too far away, to be understood, while gold was under his very feet.

"Barin—" it was scarcely a whisper, but it carried with it the obstinacy of a boy who had brooded for years: "Barin, one has prayed to one's saint for such a day . . . with riches one can thumb one's nose at officials . . . did they not kill my father when I was a child?"

Orlof sat still. The problem was a very old one with him. The peasant against the official . . . the one rebellious, sullen, revengeful . . . the other corrupt and cruel, because so often he was afraid. A quarrel which

kept Russia ignorant, and fighting within herself. It had dogged His Excellency through the twenty years of his administration; and now it flamed up in this hishnik's son and threatened to wreck his own plans.

He stood up and looked at the scene about him. It was already twilight but the hishniks still worked with a frenzy begotten of greed. One man was bailing water; another stripping top dirt; a third patching the ditch where it had broken through and flooded his pit. Heads and backs and arms showed a moment, and disappeared, as bodies swayed to their work. Nobody thought of quitting as long as they could see.

The man called Osep was nearest, so close to them that Boris Evanovich could see the expression on his face. He stood in profile, a big, slouching peasant, his frame loosely hung together, yet muscled like an ox. Half of his body was bare where his shirt had torn away, and little runnels of sweat made gleaming tracks through the grime and dirt on his skin. He was completely absorbed in transferring the yield of his afternoon's clean-up from a slab of bark into a buckskin sack which he had sewn into the tail of his shirt. At the last, he singled out a nugget as big as the top of his thumb, and after staring at it greedily he tested it with his teeth. His mouth remained open after he had removed it and his tongue licked against his lips. Orlof could read his thoughts as easily as though he had shouted them.

"Vodka enough to keep a man drunk for a long time!"

But his mood changed suddenly. With a snarl he wound a thong round the neck of the sack, shoved it out of sight,

and dropped onto his heels. There was something suggestive of an animal as he crouched, glaring, into the standing timber on the farther side of the cut.

There was a movement far back in the gloom under the trees.

Orlof's breath came faster as he, too, focused his attention sharply. *Horses!* Not one but a number, seen a moment and then gone behind an uprooted snag.

They did not appear again.

Osep snarled. It was scarcely a whisper but it penetrated the noise of shovels and latoks—and every man reached for his gun.

Orlof pressed the edge of his notebook which he carried, hishnik fashion, in a pocket on the under side of his shirt; if they were in for a raid, and he scarcely doubted it, he must decide what he was going to do. To be caught with gold thieves would mean explanations, which His Excellency had instructed him to avoid. To resist meant——

Peter, like destiny, tugged at his sleeve: "It is the Cossacks, Barin!" He thrust Orlof's rifle into his hands.

For still a moment Orlof stood undecided, looking down at the boy whose eyes were bright with an excitement which openly lusted for blood.

"Barin, thy head is a target—they shoot from cover."

Out in the timber a stick cracked, and Orlof ducked. Not so much from fear of a bullet, as because he had made up his mind. His Excellency's business must come first, therefore in the midst of the sniping which was about to begin he must disappear. Immediately behind them was the ditch. It offered cover. One moment of

scrambling and there was a sporting chance of escape, provided they could reach the horses. If not—well, what happened afterward was the price of his service. . . .

He pulled Peter by the sleeve, for though he guessed that the boy had definitely gone hishnik he must make an appeal to his loyalty. He spoke quietly as to an equal. "Petroushka, we must go at once. Thou hast not forgotten the map? It is thy service as much as it is mine."

"But Peter jerked away without so much as glancing round. "Tf-oo-ee! It is only the peddler, Barin! The lousy Asiat!" Anger, disgust, relief—he expressed them all as he pointed into the trees.

In plain sight, Ne Ah Bo was walking toward the cut and behind him a six-foot Mongol leading a string of pack horses.

Osep ceased to crouch and, one after another, the gold thieves resumed their interrupted work.

But Orlof continued to lean on his rifle. As the Chinaman went from pit to pit, greeting men that he knew, he was remembering His Excellency's story of Tsing Feng. . . .

Peter broke into his thoughts. "Ne Ah Bo, the peddler, Barin! One knew him in Gorbitza, he carries what is necessary in his packs."

Orlof nodded. "Yes," he said, "a peddler. Then perhaps we can buy a little tea."

CHAPTER X

GOLD

IN THE ordinary course of events Ne Ah Bo would have stayed in camp a couple of days at most, that being long enough to transfer to his own pockets the available supply of gold dust.

For practical purposes money did not exist in a hishnik camp, and if by chance a man possessed more than a few kopeks he kept the matter to himself. Spies in the pay of officials carried money, but spies disappeared if they were caught. And credit was non-existent. As well extend credit to a wolf as to a gold thief; what was not paid for on the nail was not paid for at all.

Every man secreted his dust in a buckskin sack under his shirt—and carried a gun. The rest of his possessions he could leave strewn about anywhere in his shelter, for the thieving of food or of property other than gold meant instant banishment, or worse. But with gold it was different. Everyone who was able to do so robbed his neighbor, either from his daily clean-up when he was careless enough to offer a chance, or by petty hold-ups and murder on the trail. Single men who traveled with it in their sacks did so at their own risk, therefore hishniks usually went in bands, and because the possession of it was risky, they converted their dust as speedily as possible into drink.

Therefore vodka was a staple article of trade. It set the price of gold and it outvalued and outweighed all the rest of a peddler's supplies.

And because the making and sale of vodka was a government monopoly, a spirit seller without a license was as much outside the law as a gold thief, and when he was caught fared as badly at the hands of those officials who, according to their lights, administered the affairs of the taiga.

Should he be a Chinaman he was in a manner of speaking between the devil and the deep sea, for both officials and hishniks would, if they could find it, drink his vodka without paying for it and afterward rob him of his gold. Nonetheless, the great majority of the peddlers in the taiga were Chinese, for unlike the average Russian peasant they did not succumb to their own liquor.

They survived by cunning, by bribery, and by silence. As middlemen they were really a necessity to the hishniks and, moreover, as they were constantly on the trail they brought news of the common enemy and thus ruined many a carefully planned raid.

Ne Ah Bo first appeared on the river at the time when the rumors of the building of the Chinese Eastern Railroad were beginning to filter through the East. Thereafter, every spring, he appeared in the vicinity of Blagovestchensk and worked his way upstream, gathering his string of horses as he went.

At Gorbitza he made up his packs and disappeared. Every season it was the same, until the taiga looked for his coming almost as it looked for the break-up of the ice. The Gorbitza merchants counted on him to buy their

supplies, and the hishniks welcomed him to their camps and learned to trust him as they never trusted each other. The smaller officials knew him as one who understood the virtue of a bribe.

Ne Ah Bo himself made friends with no one, disagreed with no one, and said little beyond what was necessary for trade. Among the Chinese he became an authority by virtue of the joss stick that he carried in his clothes, but of this the mujiks knew nothing at all. Mujiks and Chinese alike trusted him because he treated them honestly, and they respected him because, after the first season, he brought with him a Mongol from the high lands of the Gobi Desert, a giant more silent even than himself, who guarded his packs like a chain dog and hid his vodka so cunningly that no man could come by a drink until he had paid for it in gold.

As Orlof watched the two of them approach he noted that perhaps half of the peddler's horses were heavily loaded with the usual trading supplies—shirts and shoepacks, picks and shovels, tobacco and tea kettles, dried bread and tea—but he was mystified to see that the remainder of the string jogged into camp with empty pack saddles. While the hishniks were crowding round the peddler he commented on the fact to Peter.

Peter's explanation was explicit. "When hishniks are drunk, Barin, they are wild beasts. To show them a packload of drinks at one time is to ask to be robbed. So it is hidden in the taiga, and only when they have handed over their gold will it be brought to them, a measure at a time. And because there is much vodka still hidden, they will not harm the peddler until all their gold is gone. And

when it is gone, Ne Ah Bo will straightway disappear before they can begin to steal. Also, Barin, it is to be remembered that the Mongol can crush two men at one time with his bare hands."

"Ne Ah Bo is a friend of yours?" Orlof asked.

"An Asiat is merely an Asiat, Barin," Peter replied with a shrug. "If one has gold they are useful to trade." He looked thoughtfully at his latok. "By to-morrow at this time we will have washed enough for two pairs of shoepacks and perhaps some bread before it is all gone, and that is well for thou must not tell them that thou hast money in thy shirt."

"And when will the drinking begin?"

Peter considered. "To-night the Asiat will treat; no one will be drunk, but each will brag of his gold. To-morrow they will trade for supplies, after which there will be vodka for all who can buy."

"And fighting for all who can fight," Orlof added dryly. "It will be a good time to slip away."

Peter looked his scorn. "It will be a good time to dig gold! Barin, how canst thou say thou wert ever a hishnik? When there is drink those who remain sober can work in the richest spots without being made to fight. If thou wilt help me, we will fill our pockets."

Orlof looked unresponsive, and Peter added obstinately: "If thou wilt not stay I can fill my pockets alone. To leave such riches is not according to God."

Boris Evanovich did not argue, it was useless while the boy was in his present mood. Instead, he spent the evening listening to the bragging hishniks who said many things useful to his map making, and when he was not

listening he studied the wrinkles on the face of Ne Ah Bo, who, beyond offering him a drink with the rest, took no notice of him at all.

Peter sat apart, looking on at a scene which roused all the wildness in his blood: the circle of bearded, sweat-begrimed faces . . . firelight glinting on rifle barrels, and playing hide-and-seek among the tree trunks . . . beyond, the brooding darkness of the taiga . . . the hishniks relating their adventures . . . boasting of former drinking bouts and of fights with officials . . . hinting at crimes better left untold . . . the Chinaman answering in monosyllables, and the Mongol not answering at all. . . .

Little by little, by shrewd eavesdropping, he came to a knowledge of where the richest spots were to be found and who among the men were most likely to start a row when crazed by drink. As he had told Boris Evanovich, to leave such a chance was not according to God. It required no argument at all.

But during the evening Boris Evanovich, also, had formulated his plan of action, and in the morning, before it was properly light, he started off to bring in their packs. He said nothing to Peter, the boy must take his chance.

He did not return for three days, during which time he explored the country to the north and found what he hoped would prove to be a feasible road into the headwaters of the Zeya.

In order to give a reason for his absence he turned hunter and brought back a red deer which he was lucky enough to shoot.

No explanation was demanded of him, however, for

Ne Ah Bo was still in evidence and now the Mongol was openly peddling vodka, while the camp was in the midst of a disgusting spree.

Out in the cut Peter and a few of the older men were still at work; the rest were lying about in their shelters, or milling about the fire. Some of them were fighting, some were too drunk to fight; one or two had been beaten and left where they lay. The place was filthy with refuse of every description, and flies were rapidly multiplying. By nightfall it would be a shambles and by morning probably throats would be cut.

As soon as Orlof realized that his appearance was taken for granted, he made hasty preparations for a final departure. He collected what belongings he had left behind and took his horses back to the pasture, turning them out to graze. Then he returned for a last talk with Peter.

He found him crouching over bedrock in a pit which another man had dug. Beside him, on a strip of bark, was a pile of gold dust that would have made a seasoned gold thief greedy for more.

The boy greeted him with sorrow in his voice. "Ach! the pity of it, Barin. Look at this! Is it not plain that thou hast wasted three days?"

"It is thou who hast wasted thy time, Petroushka," Orlof answered quietly. "While thou wert grubbing in the dirt I have climbed to the top of a score of hills. To-morrow, at dawn, I start for the Zeya. Wilt thou come?"

For answer Peter shoveled some more dirt into his latok. "To-morrow, every man will still be drunk. Such

a chance, Barin! If thou wilt but wait one little day and help me!"

Orlof put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Hast thou forgotten thy word to the Foreigner, Peter, and also thy promise to me? Hast thou forgotten that I have said that I will send thee to school?"

Peter's head sunk lower over his work. "But there it is, Barin, my saint has put gold into our hands!"

It was the hishnik's son speaking. Not angrily—pleadingly—claiming the right to be considered. "One forgets nothing, Barin, but one remembers also that one's father was shot. Who are the officials that they should take all things in the taiga as their own?"

Orlof put his hands in his pockets and waited, and in the silence that followed Peter looked up. His eyes were rebellious—obstinate—yet puzzled. "It is not according to God, Barin!"

Orlof smiled understandingly. "Many things are not according to God, Peter! But there is thy service to be considered. . . . I shall wait for thee on the edge of the pasture until daylight. After that I go. Is it understood?"

Peter picked up his latok. "It is understood, Barin."

Through the long-drawn-out midsummer twilight Peter worked doggedly on. Bedrock was rich, unbelievably rich, and the pile of dust on the strip of bark grew until it began to trickle over the edge. But he was not happy. Orlof's closing remark mingled persistently with the gravel in his latok. "But there is thy service to be considered. . . ." It was worse than the old discomfort of leaving the taiga behind. Curiously, it set him thinking

about Feenga's handkerchief, and of the little Mischa. . . . If Feenga was true to her trust she would be keeping the flies from settling on the little one's nose. . . . It made him feel lonely merely to think of such a thing—even as the drunken singing round the fire made him feel angry. Such men were nothing but swine, ignorant mujiks, guzzling drink like soup. Orlof's words challenged him again.

"While the peasants are ignorant Russia can never be strong. . . ."

He swore unhappily. Tf-oo-ee!—What could a boy such as he know about Russia?

But his thoughts gnawed at his stomach, and continued to gnaw, until his latok lay idle in the muddy water at his feet. In the end, however, he stopped work only because his buckskin sack would not hold all the gold he had won.

He knew, because he understood the ways of Chinamen, that Ne Ah Bo would leave camp during the night; there was a late moon to travel by and the men would be too sodden to interfere. As he had need of another sack for his gold, he knotted the surplus in the tail of his shirt and climbed out of his hole.

Even as he had expected, the Mongol was loading the pack horses in the dimness of the trees. Nearer to the fire, men were fighting and swearing and singing disgusting songs, or lying together on the ground wallowing in their helplessness like hogs in a pen. Ne Ah Bo sat a little to one side with his saddlebags near him. Peter went to him and unknotted the tail of his shirt. "Sell me a

buckskin sack," he said tersely. "I have gold to pay." He was in no mood for unnecessary words.

The Chinaman produced one, and selected a nugget from Peter's store. Indicating that it was too much for a sack and that it would buy a drink as well, he proffered a half-empty bottle, and Peter, because of the ache in his thoughts, took a long drink.

The raw spirit caught at his throat and made him cough. But he handed back the bottle and swaggered to his shelter as though he were used to drinking, and feeling that at last he was a man—one who could decide important matters for himself.

"In a little while one will sing," he mused, "and one's thoughts will feel good inside!" And because he was hungry he looked about for food.

Orlof had left him meat and dried bread in his saddlebags. He dragged it out and began chewing the meat, tearing it apart with his fingers and teeth and staring at the scene around the fire.

But he soon lost his appetite and the sight of the men fighting made him miserable. "Cholera-stricken hogs!" he grumbled—and then his eyes filled with tears. They were the unfortunate ones, why should they not drink to forget? No one had promised to send them to school.

His thoughts became muddled. School . . . the taiga . . . the one against the other . . . Boris Evanovich against the Foreigner . . . Feenga's handkerchief and the flies that settled on the little one's nose. . . .

He pushed the remains of the meat back into his saddlebags. Flies—bah! Flies were like bad thoughts inside one. They buzzed and gave one a headache.

He scrambled to his feet, intending to get some tea and, as he did so, remembered that he still had his gold dust knotted into the tail of his shirt. Where was the buckskin sack? Lost. It made him angry and he walked over to Ne Ah Bo to demand another.

Between them they found it tucked into his belt and transferred the precious dust. All but the last nugget which Peter offered for another drink.

He finished what was left in the bottle and sat down beside the Chinaman. "One drinks vodka," he announced solemnly, "that Russia may be strong. Tell that to Boris Evanovich."

Ne Ah Bo's eyes fluttered a moment but he did not say a word. Instead he gathered his belongings together and joined the Mongol under the trees.

Peter looked after him. "Go with God, Asiat!" he remarked, and slipped backward over the log.

It was too much effort to get up so he lay on his back looking at the tops of the trees, and the fighting and swearing became a confused lullaby which he could not separate from the noises inside his own head. He was content to lie still until he floated into sleep.

CHAPTER XI

NE AH BO

WHEN, after a long while, Peter opened his eyes it was still night. But he felt with instinct born of the taiga that it was the hour before daylight, and as he lay gathering his wits, that faintest rustle that sweeps across the world in advance of the dawn brushed by him. It stirred the life in him and brought him suddenly to his knees. He remembered now . . . he had drunk vodka. He felt anxiously for his gold—drunkards were robbed in their sleep. . . .

But it was there, safely under his shirt, and his anxiety merged into a craving for tea. Nothing mattered but tea.

He groped his way toward the fire, trying to avoid men's bodies, and feeling a desperate need for haste for, deep inside, he knew he had something important to do.

When he found a kettle in the cooling embers he drank greedily from the spout, and spat out a mouthful of leaves. The tea had stewed all night but its bitterness only stirred him to remembrance and thought came rushing back violently.

Boris Evanovich had gone without him, and he had broken his trust. . . .

Nothing mattered but that. He had broken his trust.

Bitterly he cursed the taiga and all its ways. "Ach! the pity of it . . . that I should do such a thing . . . worse than a dog that bites his master! Nothing but a drunkard

and a thief! When the Foreigner hears of it he will spit; and Boris Evanovich . . ."

The weight of his gold sack dragging at his shirt mocked back at him. "Feenga will put out her tongue when it is told to her. . . . Ach! the pity of such a thing! To have broken one's trust. . . ."

Immediately at his feet, Osep, the hishnik, was sprawling on his face. Someone had broken a bottle over his head and blood oozed from a cut and ran down into his beard, saliva drooled out of the corner of his mouth. Peter stooped to examine him.

The man was not dead—but one day would he, Peter, be like Osep? Nothing to live for but vodka . . . to lie in the embers with a gash in his head. . . .

A new pain came to him. All the peasants were like Osep . . . no foreigner had taught them to read. . . .

With this thought tugging at his heart he stood upright, and curiously, thoughtfully, looked far toward the east. Then solemnly he crossed himself three times.

"One has been taught to read!" he murmured.

He stepped over Osep's body and went to his shelter. Very deliberately he collected his belongings, hoisted them onto his back, and without so much as a glance back moved away with the steady plodding gait of the peasant. Back there by the fire he was leaving much of his youth behind—leaving the taiga behind—but his head was up, and all the discomfort of his thoughts concentrated into a prayer that God and Boris Evanovich would give him back his trust.

Dawn was fast merging into daylight when he reached

the meadows used by the hishniks as a pasture. In the early-morning hush he looked about for the horses. It was like an answer to prayer when he saw them grazing near the edge of the stream.

The worst of his anxiety, then, was over. Boris Evanovich was not gone. He crossed himself again, this time in thanksgiving; God had listened to him. Then he herded the animals and drove them ahead of him, knowing from experience that his Barin would camp at the upper end of the pasture where a shelter had been built.

When he reached it he saw that Orlof still slept. Quietly, so as not to disturb him, he raked the fire together and put the kettle on to boil. It lightened his burden to be serving again, and it would be easier to talk while Boris Evanovich was drinking his tea. With tea one was more patient, and something had come to Peter with the dawn that he knew would be difficult to say.

First, he would give his Barin the gold—he was through with such things—and then he would kiss his feet and speak of the map, and wait for a sign in his eyes, for until his Barin had forgiven him he could not say all that was in his heart.

He took his gold from under his shirt and when tea was made carried both tea and gold across to the shelter. Kneeling down, he touched Orlof on the shoulder.

"Barin, tea is made! It is time to get up."

Orlof was lying with his back toward him, almost on his face, and as Peter knelt beside him and looked at him closely, it came to him with a shock that his Barin was drunk.

When men lay sprawling in such fashion it was wiser to let them alone.

He sat back on his heels thinking. If his Barin had been drinking it would be easier to explain! He leaned closer again, right over him, to make sure. But there was only a curious, musty smell, which filled him with a vague alarm. It was not vodka.

He shook Orlof, speaking to him. "Barin! tea is made!"

For all the response he got, his Barin might have been a log. Even his breathing was unnaturally quiet and Peter, now thoroughly alarmed, turned him over on his back.

His eyes, slightly open, but completely glazed, stared at the roof of the shelter, and Peter, knowing nothing of drugs, looked at him in amazement. "Gospodi! one would think thou hadst drunk a barrel. . . ." But suddenly his heart stopped beating for he saw that something had happened. There had been a fight.

Just under his Barin's hair, close to his temple, was a cut made by some blunt instrument, and his clothes had been torn nearly off his back, although someone had clumsily put them back into place.

Then his Barin was dead—not drunk? But no, his heart was still beating, with the steady rhythm of a sleeping man. . . .

He swung back to the drink theory with considerable relief. One must wait patiently, but while one waited his Barin should sleep more comfortably. So he rolled him into a better position and straightened his arm.

But the hand gripped something so tightly that Peter opened it out of curiosity. It held a torn fragment of Chinese clothing.

The Asiat! Peter was on his feet instantly, searching for additional clues. Now that his eyes were opened he saw everything: his Barin's hat and rifle, thrown to one side . . . his saddlebags, empty, and tossed bottom-up into the corner of the shelter . . . signs of a struggle in the footprints outside.

A saddle blanket caught his attention. He picked it up only to stare at the place where it had lain.

For there on the ground was a Chinese joss stick of beautifully polished ebony, perhaps an inch in diameter and five inches long. In the center was painted a Chinese character in gold. He had seen such a thing once before in the hands of a Chinaman, and he was frightened, for rumor said a joss stick was powerful like a cross. Asiats who carried them were priests who exercised authority over their countrymen, and on occasion meted out terrible revenge. He pushed it with his toe, and then, overcome by curiosity, he picked it up.

Ne Ah Bo! . . . He had wondered about him on the river. . . .

Of a sudden his thoughts were set racing in a new direction and he began searching desperately in his Barin's clothing.

Gospodi! The notebook was gone! And every shred of paper, every letter. . . . Only the money was still there!

Not robbery, then, but something mysterious—even as Ne Ah Bo's silence was mysterious . . . as the joss stick was mysterious. . . .

The taiga seemed to be full of eyes, and in a panic Peter shook the silent, prostrate form. But it gave back no sign.

He sat down to think things out. Ne Ah Bo and the Mongol had followed his Barin, so much was plain. And they had robbed him of what Ne Ah Bo held to be valuable—all that went to the making of the map. His Barin was not drunk with vodka but with some heathen stuff they had poured down his throat—and while he lay helpless they had escaped.

"Politics" was a word the boy did not understand, but in that moment of suspense he felt its sinister influence. His Barin had valued the map more than he valued gold. . . .

And what would his Barin do now, if he were able to command?—What must he, Peter, do? But any mujik would know that—he must follow the Asiat.

He rolled the joss stick over and over in his hand. Presently he smiled. It was a way he could serve. . . . Perhaps, if he killed Ne Ah Bo and recovered the map, Boris Evanovich would be glad to give him back his trust. And if the Mongol strangled him—well, that was his service.

He caught and saddled his pony and brought it to the fire. When he had strapped on his saddlebags, and kissed his Barin, he tucked his gold sack under his belt and walked up the pasture to look for the trail—a trail he knew now he must follow to the end. When he found it, he stripped a piece of birch bark and wrote on it:

> Barin, if thou wilt forgive? I have taken up my service and I follow the Asiat.

He carried it back to the shelter and closed it in Orlof's hand. Then the taiga swallowed him up.

PART II

CHAPTER I

THE GOVERNOR GOES FORTH

UP AND down the whole length of the Amur hay-making was in full swing. The spring and early summer had been unusually fine, and now, in the first week of July, wherever a patch of grass existed it was long enough to cut. Old men prophesied a bountiful harvest, saying that livestock and babies would be fat; tradesmen laid in extra supplies of scythes; and village peasants lifted their eyes from the ground and smiled at each other as they passed along the street.

Even officials were good-natured, for in such a year taxes would be paid with little grumbling, and the annual quota of youths for the army would be drafted without violence. For food would be plentiful, and when food was plentiful talk of revolution died down to a whisper which only the sharpest ears could detect. But for ears that were tuned to the undertow, revolution was still a menace, for revolution and hunger were bedfellows, and except in such bountiful years as this, the peasant lived always on the edge of famine.

No one knew these things better than the Governor, who sat in his throne-like chair under the shadow of the portrait of the Tsar, writing a confidential report.

". . . It is true that with such crops taxes will be paid,

and with sufficient pressure we can collect perhaps twenty-five per cent of last year's arrears. In the villages, livestock will increase and much of the ravages of the war will be covered up. And army recruits will be forthcoming, though there are still too many reports of youths who cut off their trigger finger to avoid being drafted. Even a good year does not entirely obviate such things."

He came to the end of the sheet and for a moment his pen was idle while he stared at the portrait of the Tsar. Then he pulled a fresh sheet toward him.

"You have asked for my opinion of the proposed extension of the railroad to Khabarovsk. I have sent the best available man to explore the country below Nerchinsk, his report should be in my hands within a month. If it has been definitely decided for political reasons to construct the road, next spring will be a favorable time to begin for the province will be prosperous for the first time since the war, and if taxes are to be increased——" He finished the sentence with a dash.

"But you know my settled conviction. The peasants are too ignorant for prosperity. When the crops are good they drink more and fight more among themselves, and therefore they fight less with the officials and tax collectors, so that on the surface discontent will be less apparent. But is one deceived?—The peasants remain ignorant. If taxes are to be increased it ought to be for schools. *Russia needs education far more than it needs a railroad to Khabarovsk.*

"However, one is too far from Petersburg——"

He paused a moment to attend to a spot of ink on his thumb, and before he had resumed his writing, Plotnikof,

the Secretary, came in with letters to be signed. As usual, Stenka watched the ceremony from the other end of the room. When the last signature had been affixed he opened the door for the Secretary, and followed him out.

Plotnikof was in a good temper and stopped by the window to gossip. "Has He told you we go for our annual jaunt?" he asked. "This time as far downriver as Khabarovsk."

Stenka was noncommittal. "One hears things . . ."

The Secretary patted his uniform. "Good things to eat, good weather, not a great deal of work; plenty of gossip over one's tea, a sip of vodka once in a long while—in fact, a nice little outing for us all!" He kissed the tips of his fingers to his reflection in the window, then motioned Stenka to follow him. "There is a letter to be carried to the station master."

As the Cossack had already had his instructions from the Governor, he followed the Secretary, waited for the letters to be directed and sealed, and departed in the direction of the town.

He found the station master in his office drinking a bottle of beer. The station master liked Stenka, but on such a fine afternoon he was in a lazy mood and when he saw the letter he waved it away.

"One may not be interrupted. Take it away, Cossack!"

Stenka however put it in front of him, and he broke the seal at once. As he read it he pretended disgust.

"Of all the slaves on the river, little brother, I am the hardest worked of them all! Three transcontinental passenger trains in a week, with extra coaches to be hooked on and taken off in Chita. Double the usual amount of

freight to unscramble before the harvest is shipped, and the cars with their sides dropping out. And if that is not enough thy old man must choose this hot weather to go on his travels again.

"Ah, exactly! A special train for His Excellency—one might have guessed it—with right of way over all traffic —yes indeed—to be ready at noon on Thursday! And doubtless all the smart little officers at the club are yammering to go too, and a score of scribblers besides; not to mention his pet dog, Stenka, who would pine to a shadow if left behind.

"Gospodi, Cossack! See what thy pestilent letter demands. Accommodations for two equerries, an aide-de-camp, a sergeant, and twenty Cossacks—half the army in Trans-Baikalia in a word! The private coach of His Excellency to be got ready on the instant—certainly, certainly, does he expect me to despatch him third class?— Then baggage wagon, restaurant car, a cook, servants— and other such nuisances besides. . . . Hum! hum!— Here, my good friend, drink the rest of my beer, or thy old man will be kept waiting!"

He buttoned his tunic, straightened his cap, and walked out of the room grumbling further details into his beard.

Stenka drank the beer expeditiously and left the building by a side door, crossed the square to the telegraph office, and demanded to see the head operator.

That worthy saw him coming and sighed. "What is it this time?" he asked. "Does he go on his travels again?"

Stenka handed over another sealed envelope, saluted, and withdrew. Five minutes later instruments began to

tick and, before evening, a certain lean-looking, gray police boat, that was tied up to the dock in Stretinsk, sprang to strenuous activity, while officials at various strategic points on the river began biting their nails and creasing their brows; for when the old man traveled in state it was wise to keep some things from troubling his ears—as was well known, he could ask awkward questions. . . .

While the instrument tapped out orders Stenka recrossed the square, and again passed under the great shield over the main entrance to the station, where the green and gold intertwined post horns told the illiterate peasants that here was the railroad.

Proceeding by devious ways he came to a small office in the rear of the Administration Building. Here behind closed doors sat the head of His Excellency's Secret Service, an intensely blue-eyed man, buried under a sea of reports, and apparently in no mood to be disturbed. But the moment he saw the Cossack he pushed his papers aside.

He was a stoop-shouldered, slightly built little man, with thin eyebrows and a straggling beard which did not properly cover his chin. His manner was quiet, almost shy, but his eyes were steady and he spoke with decision, wasting no words.

"Well, Stenka!—What now?"

The Cossack handed over yet another letter which, this time, he took from the lining of his cap. It was a letter which Plotnikof, the Secretary, had not sealed, and contained an itemized list of the places at which the Governor would stop.

The little man, Nakeetin, read it carefully, and made

a note in the margin; then he scratched his head and looked up. "What else?"

"Orders to travel in front, Barin, and to meet us in Blagovestchensk on the way home."

"Yes?"

"His Excellency will not be in uniform and will leave his escort behind. We will need lodgings as on former occasions. Is it understood?"

Nakeetin nodded. "Report to His Excellency that his orders will be carried out."

Stenka saluted and left.

Again Nakeetin scratched his head. "Humph!" he muttered. "So the old man thinks it is time for Tsing Feng to appear on the scene. . . . Well, we shall see!" He returned once more to his reports.

While the Governor was having his nap that afternoon, the Cossack took out two suits of clothes—one of the kind used by village merchants—the other, suitable for the servant of such a man. He carried them off to his own quarters and packed them among his belongings. This done, he made himself a cigarette and went out for a stroll. As far as he was concerned he was ready now to cross the world; and if his master desired to travel incognito, it was all one to him.

Thereafter, he carried a great many messages, and looked on with secret amusement at the bustle and excitement that attended great ones when they went forth. And when the day of departure arrived he made His Excellency comfortable on his special train, and later watched over his privacy on the police boat, as it sped downstream.

It was all an old story with him. The tension that preceded their arrival and the sigh of relief that rose up when at last they were ready to go. At each stopping place officials appearing in their best uniforms and, with secretive eyes and deferential voices, covering their iniquities with lies. The mayors and councillors of villages with loyalty on their tongues and fear in their hearts, bringing bread and salt to the Representative of their Little Father the Tsar. His Excellency, listening to the tale of their grievances, asking penetrating questions, correcting abuses where possible, attempting with patience to come by the truth. Plotnikof, the Secretary, booming like a horsefly before rain.

Stenka had been bodyservant to the Governor for a great many years. He knew even better than His Excellency the hollowness of the whole pageant. It made for nothing but weariness. But thus it ever was when great ones went forth. . . .

At Gorbitza, the mayor was accorded a lecture concerning the ways of gold thieves; and as their boat passed the mouth of the Davenda the gossip was all of the Foreigner and his impenetrable ways. At Blagovestchensk, after two days of strenuous speech making, His Excellency was weary. Hitherto he had traveled night and day, but now he ordered the police boat to anchor at the mouth of the Zeya, so that he might sleep in peace before proceeding on the last lap of his journey downstream.

By so doing, he induced widespread insomnia among the peasants of a certain insignificant little hamlet which was in sight of their anchorage. While such people knew nothing of the Governor's presence on board, police boats

were looked upon with disfavor, and they hauled their boats out of the water and set a watch to report any signs of landing on the part of the crew.

Experience had taught them that such caution was wise.

CHAPTER II

THE POLICE BOAT

FOR the best part of three weeks Peter followed the trail of Ne Ah Bo. From one hishnik camp to another, across the upper hayfields of the Zeya, into contractors' camps and out again—gradually he came into the more settled parts of the lower river. But always he arrived just too late.

It was not wise to ask questions openly, and lest officials demand that he give an account of himself he was forced to pretend that he was looking for work. More than once to his undoing he was given a job which delayed him distressingly until he could run away.

Finally his trail ran out and stopped. Ne Ah Bo had disappeared and gossip was silent.

He had reached a considerable village which boasted a church with a gilded dome and also a steamer landing. Cautious questioning produced no better result than unpleasant attention from the Mayor, who suspected him of illicit vodka selling; as illicit vodka selling in that village was the Mayor's monopoly, he was ready to be correspondingly incensed.

So Peter left town during the night and doubled back on his trail. He was tired and disheartened; but there was nothing to do but go on, for he did not dare face Boris Evanovich and tell him that he had failed.

In the morning he stopped in a birch grove to make tea and pasture his horse; after which as rabbits were plentiful he set his snares and lay down for an hour's sleep. On waking, he found a rabbit in one of the snares, and because he was completely puzzled as to his next move he decided to skin and cook it at once.

It was fortunate that he did so, for while he was eating it a man on horseback rode into the glade, and Peter, who never forgot a horse, recognized it as one that had belonged to Ne Ah Bo.

Here was a clue, and he invited the mujik to eat. But he did not dare to begin questioning him too abruptly, and the last leg of the rabbit was nearly gone before the man afforded him an opening.

"Traveling far?" he asked.

This was precisely what Peter did not know, so he evaded the question.

"One supposes harvest will begin soon?"

"Certainly it will begin soon," the man grumbled. "The biggest crops in a lifetime and not a scythe to be had in the whole country." He glared resentfully at Peter as though he felt him to be responsible. "One missed the steamer yesterday through buying that horse and getting drunk; and now one must ride to the mouth of the river and get ferried across, for with all the stores sold out it is necessary that one buy one's scythes in Blagovestchensk. A pretty enough state of affairs when there are a thousand things waiting to be done at home."

At any other time Peter would have been sympathetic, but the topic of scythes was not likely to help him in his search for Ne Ah Bo. "It is a good enough horse!" he

suggested by way of bringing the talk into a more likely channel.

The man chuckled. "One bought it cheap, too! Forty roubles, with a bottle of vodka thrown in. But the Asiat who sold it was in a hurry to catch the steamer. As well have demanded a second bottle if one had thought of such a thing in time. But there it is! In the end, it was an expensive bottle for one missed the steamer to Blagovestchensk."

Peter had difficulty in sitting still. He had blundered on to Ne Ah Bo's trail!

But the man was talking again, and almost his first words produced fresh discouragement. "Dost thou know Blagovestchensk? No?—Well there is a city for thee! As big as the taiga! Its streets twist and turn so endlessly one is lost as in a fog, for there are no trees to mark the way—and its stores are not to be believed. Two-story buildings of brick, with windows as wide as the end of a barn. A mujik is afraid to go in."

Peter's heart sank. "One supposes there are a great many Chinese peddlers?"

"Asiats?"—His companion lowered his voice significantly. "Of a truth there are Asiats! At the time of the massacre twelve thousand were killed, though even so half of them escaped. And Chinatown was burned. But what of it?—In twos and threes they have come back until they are more plentiful than fleas."

"But the army is there!" Peter objected. "A whole regiment of Cossacks to stop them."

"Such things make for nothing," the man retorted. "Is

it not known that Asiats give bribes—*a little hair oil,* as the saying is—and the officers grow fat!"

He rambled on for half an hour and then, as there was nothing more to eat, he rode away, again cursing the shortage of scythes.

And Peter, his courage in his boots, followed—there seemed nothing else to be done. But how to find Ne Ah Bo in such a monstrous city was more than he could divine . . . unless, of course, he had influence with his saint.

Usually he believed in his saint, and now as he jogged along he reminded him that he had never before drunk vodka—or at least he had never before been drunk—and that with, or without, his assistance he intended to recover the map. And since the map was designed to make Russia strong, and since St. Peter was certainly a Russian, surely a little help in a crisis was little enough to expect.

He felt in his clothes for the Chinaman's joss stick. His possession of such a talisman was undoubtedly fortunate, for without it Ne Ah Bo would be handicapped in praying to his particular saint! . . .

It was a beautiful day and gradually Peter's spirits rose. It would make a great story to tell Feenga when he got home. . . .

He was still optimistic when he reached a little settlement at the mouth of the Zeya. Here he sold his horse without a great deal of trouble. He then set about the far more difficult task of finding a way to cross the Amur to Blagovestchensk, for it would not do for a boy such as he, without a passport, to attempt openly to hire a boat.

But the thoughts of every villager seemed to be entirely occupied in preparation for the coming harvest, and after he had vainly spent a couple of days haunting the waterfront, Peter was ready to contemplate stealing a dug-out.

The appearance of a lean, gray police boat, however, interfered with his plans, for instead of sneaking away secretly after dark, as he had intended, he was commandeered to help pull all the villagers' craft out of the water. And thereafter he was advised, for his own good, to keep out of sight.

One small storekeeper in particular was noisy in his warnings. "Those swine on the police boats, they come ashore to buy food for the officers, and for every chicken they demand a commission, until one's profit is dwindled to a kopek. Cholera take them! I have a hundred chickens to sell and if they find them out I am a ruined man."

Peter was impressed. "A hundred chickens! Then thou art rich. . . ."

The man grunted. "Rich? Chort!—there is little enough profit and many expenses. But this once I will fool these Chenovniks!"—he shook his fist at the boat. "If thou art not frightened in the dark, young one, thou canst earn a few kopeks."

Peter showed no great eagerness. Work might mean delay and he was impatient to cross the river.

But the storekeeper was determined. He took Peter by the arm. "When they come ashore at daylight my chickens will be already in the big town over there. Come, I will give thee a good supper and to-morrow, after thou

hast helped me unload, thou canst spend the day looking into the windows of the shops. Is it agreed?"

Thus it was that Peter crossed the river to Blagovestchensk.

In company with a hundred chickens, packed into crates and covered with sacking to prevent them from making a noise, they drifted past the mysterious police boat, where a white-haired old man in uniform stood in the doorway of the cabin behind the bridge. The old man saw their boat and moved over to the rail to look down upon it. Whereupon Peter crossed himself and did not breathe freely again until the darkness had swallowed them up.

They landed quite openly at the dock an hour or two after daylight. This surprised Peter as he had expected secrecy—just why he could not have explained, unless it was the memory of the white-haired old Chenovnik who had watched them from the rail of the police boat. There was a look of authority about that old man which had troubled Peter's sleep during the hour or two they rested on the beach before they poled their way upstream, but the chicken trader had no such qualms. He dismissed the police boat as of no further importance, while he concentrated his attention on navigating the Amur safely, and thereafter he talked of nothing but the disposal of his freight.

People in Blagovestchensk were tricky, it seemed. . . . One did not sell one's livestock wholesale on the dock . . . such a thing made for nothing. The wise ones traded in more leisurely fashion, a chicken at a time. . . .

As Peter listened intermittently to the endless stream of words, it suddenly dawned on him that here in this

load of chickens he might find that which he was seeking —the chance that would lead him to Ne Ah Bo!

But, peasant fashion, he began to talk of other things. "How does one come by breakfast without money?" he asked.

The chicken trader considered the point. "One can beg, certainly, but it makes for little unless one has something to show—a crippled hand for example. But there it is, thou art healthy as a young colt. I will give thee a breakfast if thou wilt carry my chickens into the town; I have a cousin who takes in lodgers, and I put my chickens in his yard."

Peter accepted the offer. "And thy cousin," he asked, "at what trade does he work?"

His companion chuckled. "Work?—He is among God's fortunate ones—there is a girl with a club foot that belongs to him! He has taught her to beg and when there are chickens she sells them from door to door. She gets higher prices because of her lame foot, and this gives my cousin his commission while I am well paid. What more can anyone ask?"

"What more indeed!" Peter agreed. "And thy cousin and the lame one will of a certainty know the streets of Blagovestchensk. Such a man will know also in what place one must look for work. If then he could take me for a lodger!—one could, with his help earn enough to pay."

The chicken merchant thought that it might be arranged, and when they had landed he left his freight in charge of the dock watchman and took Peter a mile across town to the house of his cousin.

CHAPTER III

PETER LEARNS TO BEG

AFTER breakfast, his lodgings secured, Peter set off with a barrow to get the chickens, and as he trundled along the streets his hopes took definite shape. He had talked to the club-footed daughter who begged for the family living, and she had given him a wonderful idea.

Lisa was almost his own age, and rather pretty in spite of her twisted leg, and her rags, which were professional, and she had a pathetic little droop to her mouth, as though she were often ill-treated, which made Peter sorry for her. He did not know yet that the expression was professional too.

When she brought him his breakfast she seemed friendly enough and listened with interest when he told her he wanted a job. Then she laughed a little.

"If thou art a clever boy and will listen to me, I can teach thee to beg! *Lame from birth, Barin. . . . One has never been able to work.*" Her whine made Peter giggle, it was so suddenly different from her usual voice.

"And one would come to know the city!" he suggested. "It would be interesting." And because he had discovered a little about girls from Feenga he smiled into her eyes. "I will carry thy chickens and thou wilt teach me. It will be fun if we go together!"

Lisa's eyes smoldered. "Sometimes they beat me," she informed him, "and one must not be angry if they swear! Perhaps if we gave thee a crutch . . ."

Peter pushed his barrow toward the dock and limped valiantly by way of practice. *"Lame from birth, Barin. . . .* " He tried to imitate her whine.

But it was going to take practise to make a beggar.

He was so intent on his impersonation that when he reached the waterfront he almost ran over an insignificant little man who was sitting idly on the end of the chicken crate, with nothing to do apparently but whittle a stick and gaze across the river.

Peter's limp was noticeable enough for the man to look at his foot. His eyes were so steady, and so unusually blue, that the look made Peter uncomfortable. "Buy a chicken?" he suggested. "A fat one!"

"There is something in that, if thou couldst remember to bring it to my house," the man replied. He gave the address and went back to his whittling and when Peter, having loaded his barrow, left him, he was once more interested only in the river.

He was still there when Peter, limping now almost professionally, came back for his last load. The boy, resting a moment, also turned his attention in the direction of the river.

It was truly a great waterway. Some day, who could say, he might follow it to far-away Nicholievsk. He opened his mouth to say something of the sort when, at the junction of the Zeya, the lean gray police boat, trailing smoke from both funnels, shot out into view and turned its bow downstream.

Peter did what any peasant would have done. He spat after it. "Tf-oo-ee!"

The Blue-eyed One saw it also, but he merely yawned and threw his stick into the water. "Don't forget the chicken!" he said. And Peter, having relieved his feelings concerning the police boat, loaded the last of his freight and limped away.

He found Lisa waiting for him in the shed. "Now we will turn thee into someone!" she announced with enthusiasm. "Take off thy shoepack from the foot that is to be lame."

Peter had been limping all the morning on his right foot. So he stripped it bare and presented it for inspection.

Lisa looked at it with admiration. "It is beautiful and straight," she said with a little sigh. "Such a pity to make it lame!"

Peter looked doubtful. "Make it lame?"

"Certainly! It must be painful, or thou wilt forget and the first Chenovnik we meet——" She shrugged expressively, and without consulting him scooped up a handful of grit and dropped it into his shoe.

"Wear it without a sock!" she ordered.

Peter inserted his foot and tried to walk, first on his heel and then on his toes. *"Ach, te Gospodi!* it cuts like a knife!" He raised his foot to shake the sharp pebbles more comfortably to the center, but she pounced on him like a little cat.

"Silly one!"—She was down on her knees tying the strings of his shoepack tightly round his ankle, so that he

could do nothing. "Now then, thou wilt use thy crutch as though God has in truth touched thee!"

Peter stood on one leg until she brought him a crutch. Then he tried to walk with it. "Tf-oo-ee! Lisa, in an hour one will be ready to pray!"

Lisa dismissed the matter. "It will help thee to talk with the beggar's voice. Hold thy hand so . . . with the fingers in such a manner . . ." She crumpled them up to look beseeching. Then after a moment she smoothed them out with her own fingers and examined the palm. "It is such a decent hand, Petroushka, thou must hide it in thy sleeve. . . .

"And now thy clothes—Byedda!"— She was gone almost before Peter was aware of it, so he stood where he was and looked down at himself with misgiving. His shirt was stained, and two months in the taiga had reduced his trousers almost to rags; but compared to the beggar's outfit with which Lisa presently appeared they looked like veritable holiday garments.

"Take off thy shirt!" she commanded.

When he was stripped, she arrayed him in all that was left of a coat so large that it came almost to his knees, while the sleeves completely covered his hands. "It smells," she remarked, as she turned up one cuff to allow him to handle his crutch, "but it is well for a beggar to smell somewhat foul; they will give money to get rid of thee."

Bundling his rags together, she tied a rope round his waist. "Now, when thou hast dirtied thy face——" She stood like an artist in front of a picture.

As soon as she was satisfied, without warning she as-

sumed her professional rôle. Thrusting her hair beneath her handkerchief she was off, limping round the shed, one hip higher than the other. As she stopped in front of Peter there was a piteous expression about her mouth and she was trembling a little, from fear or weakness. One hand was held out beseechingly.

"For the love of the Holy Mother, High-born, one little kopek for a poor one who cannot walk. . . ."

So good was the performance that Peter grinned with discomfort.

Lisa clapped her hands. "One can fool even thee, Petroushka!" Then with sudden seriousness she added: "Beggars are like brothers, Peter, they share money as well as beatings together, it is all one!"

"I shall not like it if they beat thee," Peter remarked.

Lisa looked up at him with warm eyes, and touched his arm shyly. "A beating is not such a great matter; and remember, if one beats thee thou must give no answer or thou wilt sleep in jail, and there it will be discovered that thy lameness is nothing but pebbles in the shoe. And now, hang two chickens to thy belt and give me two, and we will go."

"What are the use of two chickens?" Peter asked. "One can sell twice as many in an hour."

She looked at him patiently. "Silly one, the chickens are only to fool the police; one must make them last a long time."

"But already I have sold one to a man on the dock, he gave me his address. How does one find it?"

"It is close to Chinatown," she said, when it had been

explained to her. She knew the streets as thoroughly as a dog.

They set out together, limping along the street.

For the rest of the day Peter had enough to do managing his crutch and watching Lisa at work. It almost frightened him the way she could change her voice, one minute pouring out her sorrows in trembling accents, the next chattering gaily about anything that came into her head; one minute a beggar, the next merely a girl who was a little excited at being with a boy of her own age.

Peter began to like her, and because of it he wanted to beg with her, but he did not dare. Then something happened.

Lisa was begging inside a store, and Peter was standing leaning on his crutch waiting for her when he became aware that he was obstructing the path of an officer. By his uniform Peter knew him to be a man of authority, one who would stand no nonsense, therefore he moved quickly. But by this time the pebbles in his shoe had made him genuinely lame and his limp was quite professional. It caught the attention of the officer, who looked at him carelessly and flipped him a coin.

As Peter retrieved a twenty-five kopek piece, for the first time in his life he had a momentary feeling of kindness for a Chenovnik. Also it gave him a feeling of security. He moved closer to the store window and examined his reflection in the glass.

If begging was as easy as that and his disguise could fool a Chenovnik, might not even Ne Ah Bo be deceived? . . . He was still wondering about it when Lisa rejoined him.

When he showed her the coin she looked thoughtful. "We will go into Chinatown, and if the Asiats will give thee money then thou canst in truth call thyself a beggar, for they are not as Chenovniks are; they look at one, and though they say little, they know."

Peter examined his reflection a second time, even more critically; it seemed a poor enough outfit to deceive an Asiat like Ne Ah Bo. He grinned uncomfortably wondering what to do.

Should he tell Lisa?—Should he explain to her about the map, and about the buckskin sack which still hung so heavily in his trouser pocket? The quickest way to Ne Ah Bo would of a certainty be to ferret out those Asiats who dealt in stolen gold. . . .

It would seem to be a good thing to tell her. One who knew every twist and turn of Chinatown. One who could change her voice so wonderfully. Suppose then he were to tell her of his trust. . . .

Tell her of his trust?—But had he not, then, promised the Foreigner in Gorbitza to tell no one—*not anyone at all?* And now, merely because he was lonely and a little puzzled, and because her eyes were so very friendly, he had nearly broken the promise so solemnly given.

From where he stood he could see Lisa's face, also reflected in the window. She was watching him so intently that he began to be afraid lest she read his thoughts; or perhaps like Ne Ah Bo she might suspect something. He jerked round and grinned, to cover up his thought.

"Where is the house of the one to whom I sold the chicken?" he asked.

Lisa was looking at him with eyes that were indeed

friendly, but they were also shrewd, and perhaps a little sorrowful. "One thought to turn thee into a beggar, Petroushka, but it makes for nothing. Thy face is all the time too honest." She mimicked his best attempt at a beggar's whine. *"Lame from youth, Barin . . .* It is necessary that we make another story, if it is to be believed! See! thou hast cut thy foot—is it understood? With a proper rag and chicken's blood we can give a reason for thy crutch."

Her voice beseeched now in more natural tones. *"Barin, for the love of God . . . one is hungry . . . one cannot work until the new moon . . .* There, that is thy new story! And if thou tellest it to a woman, it is well to smile, and if she is young look deeply into her eyes, Petroushka."

Peter's grin took on a new twist. "Glory be to thy saint, Lisa! Now I can empty the pebbles out of my shoe."

"Come then. I will show thee the house where thy chickens are to be left."

They spent the rest of the day in Chinatown, where Lisa did most of the work because Peter was busy with a new kind of map making; for in such a place he must learn his way as thoroughly as a cat if he were ever to find Ne Ah Bo. This Chinatown was not a collection of huts as in Gorbitza, but a twisting maze of alleys and courtyards and underground passages—though of the latter Peter as yet knew nothing.

The streets of Russian villages, and even of Russian cities like Chita and Blagovestchensk, were often crooked and of uneven width, but at least there was system, and when one entered a street one knew that somewhere there

would be an opening into another. But in Chinatown it was not thus; here all was confusion. Alleys ended in courtyards with no exit, houses and shops were set down anywhere, and warehouses and tea compounds blocked great areas as if they were forts.

For Blagovestchensk did not depend on the river and Siberia alone for its trade. Now, as in older days, it was in great part a Chinese settlement with caravans pushing their way up from the south, through the mountains, bringing with them the trade of the Orient.

And Russia seemed as powerless to stop this invasion as His Excellency was powerless to stop the steady infiltration of Chinese into the taiga of the north. In spite of heavy taxation, and periodical massacres, the Chinese continued to do business in Blagovestchensk; and in spite of the Tsar's ukase, Chinese and Mongols and Buriats from the high lands of the Gobi, Manchurians from the plains—even the hated yellow men from Japan—poured northward into the river country in a steady tide.

They said little about their business and because they rarely retaliated under ill-treatment the army despised them, but thoughtful men, such as His Excellency, recognized their strength.

Peter, intent on his own problems, realized that in such a Chinatown nothing but good fortune and the personal intervention of his saint could bring him to Ne Ah Bo.

If he was less silent than an Asiat he at least had the patience of a peasant, and while Lisa collected kopeks he peeped systematically into doorways, and limped industriously into blind alleys to discover whither they went.

In one such place he saw a Mongol disappearing into a tunnel between two buildings, and with his heart beating hopefully he hobbled after him. He had yet to learn that Mongols were numerous in Chinatown.

When he reached the end of the tunnel he found himself entering a suffocating opium den. To account for his presence he began to beg and for once his whine was a credit to Lisa's training. But instead of money he received a dishpan of dirty water in his face and there seemed nothing to do but go back in search of the girl.

She was looking for him at the entrance of the alley and she scolded him angrily for leaving her. "Dost thou know nothing at all?—In such a place a policeman would not dare to go alone. Must one lead thee by the hand?"

She did so for a hundred yards, to make sure that he understood. Peter said nothing at all for he realized that he belonged to the taiga, and this labyrinth of rabbit burrows filled him with despair.

But presently his very knowledge of hunting came to his rescue. With every footmark obliterated, he could not hope to stalk Ne Ah Bo as he had followed him across the ranges into the Zeya; but when game trails were confusing in the taiga one lay in hiding beside a waterhole, or at the place where animals crossed a stream, and if one were patient in time one might shoot a deer. In like manner in such a place as this one must find cover near a street where all men passed. Only so could one hope for success.

He set himself to search for such a place.

In Gorbitza it would have been the church, but in

Chinatown he did not know; streets ran wild like rabbit tracks in the snow—and yet, with patience, one snared rabbits even in the snow.

Patiently then he set to work, turning Lisa this way and that until at last he recognized something in the nature of a square.

Here the stores were larger and the houses better built. Men loaded and unloaded their pack horses in the street, people stood about in groups doing business and gossiping, and Lisa pointed out a building decked with lanterns and long red strips of Chinese writing, which she told him was a theater; inside he could hear the thrumming of instruments and drums.

Secretly he crossed himself for luck. And now, somewhere—in some alley, or on the roof of some building—he must find a place to hide; and if St. Peter were awake, sooner or later Ne Ah Bo would cross the square.

All day Lisa had watched over him like a broody hen, but to-morrow he must be rid of her; and to manage this he must impress her with his ability to go alone. He began to beg with energy, watching men's faces closely to see whether they suspected his disguise.

Nobody seemed to, though very few of them gave him money. Some of them pushed him away impatiently, others ignored him entirely, but he kept at it until Lisa signaled that she was ready to go home. And because by now he had discovered that many Mongols came to this place with their animals, he began to have hopes that he might even yet discover the one who traveled with Ne Ah Bo.

On their way home Lisa counted her money and offered

to divide. When Peter objected she flared up. "But beggars are brothers and sisters—they share honestly—food, and money, and beatings, and—and everything else!"

Her eyes said more than her tongue, and Peter, feeling ashamed of the few paltry kopeks he had won, added a whole rouble from the money he had received from the sale of Boris Evanovich's horse. Even so it was less than Lisa's contribution though it was a good deal more than she had expected.

"Didn't I know thou wert a clever one!" She looked a little wistful. "With thy smile, Petroushka, and with thy foot properly wrapped in a bloody rag, thou canst beg of the women in their very kitchens. They will give thee money and perhaps also a kiss, but thou must go alone."

To go alone! . . . The idea suited Peter perfectly. But all the way home he was silent, not because he was thinking of the women who might kiss him, but because he realized it would be well to sharpen his kinjal before he went alone into the byways of Chinatown.

CHAPTER IV

SECRET SERVICE

IF PETER had followed his inclinations he would have gone off alone at daylight, but Lisa had other ideas. Undoubtedly she had adopted him, for overnight she mended his shirt and in the morning she brought him his breakfast and even smuggled some sugar into his tea, which was a luxury usually reserved for holidays.

Also, she bandaged his foot in so skillful a manner that none could fail to notice it. "Thou must remember thy story, Petroushka: it was cut with a scythe. *Three toes almost gone, Barin! A scythe cut takes a great while to heal . . . one goes hungry. It is a bad business, Barin, there is nothing to do but beg!*"

To get rid of her Peter resorted to strategy, for he was anxious to be alone. "One has promised to deliver a chicken, and afterward one can beg of the women, as was said yesterday. Thou thyself canst get more money on the street, and I do not choose to take part of what thou hast earned."

Lisa's head was wiser than her years. She nodded agreement. "It may be true that thou wilt get money, Petroushka, but it is I who have taught thee. Thou must remember it."

Peter reassured her and hurried away. He went straight to deliver the chicken but before he reached the

address he hid his crutch, which was fortunate for he met the blue-eyed Stranger actually leaving the yard.

"Humph! so thou hast remembered," he said. "That is well. But what does one see? Yesterday thou wert somewhat lame—to-day thou hast cut thy foot."

Peter grinned. "One is clumsy, Barin. It is not a great matter." And because the blue eyes were disconcertingly steady he moved on to safer ground. "May one hope to bring another chicken, Barin?"

The man nodded. "Ask the Baba in the kitchen, say I will have two visitors on Saturday." He paid for the one Peter had brought and gave him ten kopeks over for a tip.

Peter went to the kitchen. He found the cook scraping the floor with a knife. She was not in a good temper and, contrary to Lisa's prediction, she quite overlooked Peter's smile. "Put it down on that box," she said, "and keep thy dirty rag off my clean floor! Visitors on Saturday, did the good-for-nothing say? Well, he has hired my room so doubtless he knows who will be there. Thou canst bring three chickens, so that there will be something over to steal—even a cook is entitled to a little hair oil."

Ordinarily Peter would have haggled over the price, but he left it at that, and when he had recovered his crutch he headed straight for the theater in the center of Chinatown.

The square was even more crowded than before, and Peter sighed with relief. Of a certainty this was the place, with men and pack animals everywhere, coming and going, so intent on their private business that no one would think of him at all.

Yet he set about his preparations with as much care as though he were setting a trap for a lynx, for he remembered they were Asiats, who for all their quietness were quick to see.

First he must find a place, the roof of a building for choice, where he could look down into the square, then if Ne Ah Bo or the Mongol came he would see them. So he set to work at once to make himself familiar with every last detail of the surroundings.

The square was formed by the junction of three considerable streets, and there were five alleys which opened at irregular intervals into as many courtyards. Only one of these alleys had an exit and this one was opposite the theater. He marked it as a possible way of escape if he were chased.

Everywhere the buildings in Chinatown, as far as he had seen, were low single-story structures of mud or dried brick, covered with lime. Only the theater was two stories, and it was built of logs. One other building also was of logs. It was evidently a warehouse and was built along the side of the alley that had an exit, with its end opening into the square. For some reason its shutters were all closed.

Partly because of this, and partly because he was used to log houses, Peter felt drawn to explore this building farther; and after spending a large part of the forenoon poking about various alleys, vainly looking for a chance to climb onto one roof or another without being seen, he returned to the log building and peeped in through the cracks of the shutters to see what was inside.

It seemed to be empty, and as by this time he was al-

most desperate at his want of success, he went back along the alley and into a courtyard at the rear.

For some minutes he had to pretend to be a beggar, before he dared try the door. It opened to his touch and as he stepped inside he was ready with his tale of a damaged foot. But the place was not only empty, it was gutted from fire and a pile of ruined hides partly burned and partly rotten sent up such a stench that he sneezed.

It resounded through the vacant building like the trump of doom. But as no one appeared to drive him out he felt his way cautiously toward the shuttered windows at the front. By prying one of them the least little bit with his crutch he was able to see out. The view he got was disappointing, however; it consisted of men's backs.

By now his eyes were more used to the half light, and he discovered that part of the ceiling, which was constructed of poles, had been torn away at the time of the fire. This offered a ready-made trap door, and after a good deal of scrambling and by using his crutch as a prop, he managed to climb up under the roof.

His difficulties were not over, however, for he found that both ends of the roof were boarded up. But having come thus far he refused to give in, and after a great deal of trouble he managed, with infinite care not to attract attention, to enlarge a knot hole so that he could look down on practically the whole of the square.

This accomplished, he set himself patiently to watch the never-ending procession of people who passed across his line of vision. Asiats from the south came and unloaded their pack horses in front of the stores, merchants stood in their doorways and advertised their wares,

a constant stream of people poured in and out of the theater, and once or twice there was a fight to relieve the monotony of it all.

Toward the middle of the afternoon Lisa appeared. She was looking about everywhere for him, and Peter prayed fervently that she would go away, for if Ne Ah Bo or the Mongol should come along she would be a serious embarrassment. How could he follow them without explaining his trust?

But in half an hour or so she limped away in the direction of the waterfront, and he crossed himself with relief. Girls after all were a responsibility—except perhaps Feenga who would mostly do as she was told.

Lisa had scarcely gone when the blue-eyed Stranger came into the square.

He wandered about for a while looking at the people and then went into the theater. Peter had forgotten all about him by the time he came out; but he was far too keen-eyed to miss him, and noticed that in passing he made a sign to a Jap, who had been leaning against a post all the afternoon.

"There goes a spirit seller," Peter decided. "One who is too clever to work." The idea set him thinking. Would spirit selling be better than watching whole days through a knot hole for someone who might never come?

He began wondering if he could scrape up acquaintance with the Blue-eyed One. A spirit seller went everywhere, knew everybody, even the police—and when people were drinking they talked, one might get word of Ne Ah Bo.

He pondered over this possibility until it was nearly dark.

Then the Stranger appeared again and Peter, acting on impulse, dropped down into the empty building, intending to follow him.

As it turned out, he nearly ran into his arms, for when he opened a crack of the rear door to see if the coast was clear, there was the Stranger himself entering the courtyard.

He was walking rapidly, almost running, and obviously wished to avoid notice. He took cover under the narrow little porch that shadowed the door where Peter watched.

There was nothing for Peter to do but to remain absolutely still. Even to close the crack of the door was out of the question, for the Stranger was near enough to be touched; and so, scarcely breathing, he waited.

Presently two Chinamen came into the courtyard. They were dressed in short blue jumpers, with full Chinese trousers tucked into padded white stockings, and they shuffled along a little clumsily in regulation sandals. There were hundreds of such men to be seen anywhere in Chinatown. From their dress they might have been small storekeepers, and Peter would have dismissed them with scarcely a glance had not something about the nearest man caught his attention.

He was taller than the average Chinaman and very sparsely built, and though he stooped there was a dignity about him which even the casual onlooker could scarcely miss. His pigtail was gray and he wore a thin mustache and an even thinner beard which flowed from the point of his chin almost to his waist.

He carried his hands buried deeply in the sleeves of his jumper, and as he passed Peter's line of vision he left

behind him an impression of authority, of dignity and pride of race, just as the white-haired Chenovnik on the police boat had done. Peter did homage in his own fashion.

"There goes a high-born one!" he thought, and he moved instinctively to get another glimpse. In so doing he might easily have betrayed his presence but that the Stranger seemed to be preoccupied also.

Like Peter he was looking intently after the High-born One. He had crouched down into the shadows as the two men passed, but now he straightened up with cautious alertness, and presently was gone, following them up the courtyard in the direction of the alley that had an exit on to a back street.

As soon as it was safe Peter opened the door. More than ever he was bent on trailing this stranger, who betrayed so much interest in the high-born Asiat. Gossip on the river whispered that great ones purchased gold dust from lesser men, who in their turn traded with hishniks, such as he. Perhaps this Blue-eyed One was a master hishnik, or more likely a contractor who had grown rich by cheating officials—a clever one who might possibly lead him to Ne Ah Bo.

In his excitement he forgot his crutch, and the delay very nearly cost him his chance, for by the time he had retrieved it his quarry had disappeared. But he hurried across the courtyard and down the back alley to the street beyond, and there through the deepening twilight he descried again the figure of the Stranger walking ahead of him.

He stalked him patiently for ten minutes, coming by

devious ways back into the square. But somewhere en route the two Chinamen had disappeared.

Apparently the Stranger was satisfied, however, for he strolled through the crowd without looking about him, only saying a word in passing to the Jap, who was still leaning against his post. Peter followed him all the way to his lodgings, and grimaced sulkily after him as the door closed.

"That for thee, thou stinking vodka seller!" he grumbled.

Then, remembering that he was hungry and that Lisa would be looking for him, he set off slowly homeward carrying his crutch carelessly under his arm. Lisa was a girl therefore she would ask a great many questions, and because he was a beggar who had not begged a single kopek there was nothing to do but lie. It meant he would have to share more of the money he had received from his horse. Girls could be a great nuisance with their questions and the way they looked at one—and yet it was nice to have them look at one and afterward to mend one's shirt.

Thinking about such things, he mended his pace and was glad to find Lisa waiting for him at the gateway to the yard.

She fussed over him. "Bad one to frighten me! When one begs in kitchens one is sometimes bitten by a dog—thou art late!"

Peter pretended a masculine indifference. "One has a rouble and fifteen kopeks to share, little one. I have sold three chickens, and none offered to kiss me, therefore tomorrow I shall go alone as before."

But all the evening, while the lame girl hovered over him chattering of unimportant things, he continued to speculate about the Stranger with blue eyes. Here was a man who hired a whole room to live in and who entertained visitors; also he was interested in the high-born Asiat who wore a beard; and he shared a secret with a Jap who spent whole days leaning against a post. Peter smiled at Lisa without having heard a word of her talk. Of a certainty the Jap was watching for somebody, even as he himself was watching for Ne Ah Bo. The Stranger, and the Jap, and the Asiat with a beard—there was room for a great deal of thought—though just why it should interest him he could not have told.

Next morning, when he had at last got rid of Lisa, he was still wondering about them, and when he had established himself at his lookout the first thing he did was to search for the Jap. Exactly as yesterday he was there, leaning against his post. There were two of them watching, then, it seemed. Peter made himself as comfortable as possible and waited for the Blue-eyed One to come.

But he did not appear. Indeed for hours nothing at all happened; even the Jap seemed to tire and he moved to a new place. Then the sun came round and shone into Peter's peephole and made it difficult for him to see out. The warmth made him sleepy also, and from sheer boredom he fell into a doze.

When he woke up it was evening, and at the moment he looked out the Stranger was leaving the theater. Just as before he spoke to the Jap, and just as before he started off across the square. Peter, still not properly awake, but with a dismal feeling that, by sleeping, he had

again endangered his trust, swung down through the trap door, intending to follow him.

A second time he nearly ran into him, for the Stranger again took cover in the porch and presently, as before, the high-born Asiat and his companion passed by. But though Peter trailed the three of them, the end of the adventure was the same. He lost the two Chinamen, and uselessly followed the Stranger to his lodgings.

He reached home with a headache, and when Lisa began fussing he called her a dirty little thief. Whereupon she boxed his ears and, thereafter, was so sweet to him that he went to bed as much mystified about girls as he was about the whereabouts of Ne Ah Bo.

When he awoke he seemed to have reached a decision in his sleep. The high-born Asiat was a man of influence in Chinatown. He would find out where he lived; and thereafter he would think what he would do. As for Blue-eyes, he had gold to sell probably—he dismissed him at least temporarily, and as he hobbled past his lodgings spat over the fence.

It happened that the blue-eyed Stranger was looking out of the window, and being head of the Secret Service of His Excellency the Governor, he looked after Peter reflectively. He was far too astute to believe him an authentic beggar in spite of his crutch.

For the third day in succession Peter settled down to watch. But to-day he was in no mood for sleep, and before noon his patience was rewarded, for the high-born Asiat walked into the square. He seemed to have business with no one, pushing his way straight through the crowd and entering an eating house so exactly opposite

Peter's knot hole that he could see him sitting down to his meal.

"Gospodi!"—Peter crossed himself—"Is one not also hungry?" Without losing a moment he abandoned his post and, watching his opportunity, slipped into the eating house and spent fifteen precious kopeks on chop suey. While he ate it slowly to make it last until the High-born One had finished his meal, he prayed fervently that the blue-eyed Stranger would not appear and scare away his game.

Fortunately he did not, and with the coast clear Peter followed the Chinaman out of the eating house, down the alley, and into the street beyond. From there it was a matter of only a few minutes to trail him to his house.

It was a mean little dwelling, even for Chinatown. At most, it contained two rooms, with probably an opening into an alley at the rear. Because at the moment Peter was undecided what to do next, he went to investigate, and found as he had expected that the alley was a trap with no exit, and that seen from behind it was next to impossible to be certain which was the house.

However, it was not for nothing that one was a beggar with a crutch. He selected what appeared to be the most likely door, rapped in the approved manner that Lisa had taught him, and while he waited tried vainly to remember his whine. But when the door opened his voice wheezed without any effort at all. For he found himself unexpectedly confronted by Ne Ah Bo's Mongol who, with a surly grunt, and without any sign of recognition, slammed the door in his face.

There was no mistaking the Mongol, and in the next five seconds Peter did the best bit of map making of his career, for he established the position of the door before he bolted back again toward the street. But at the first twist in the alley his way was barred. He ran head on into a pack horse loaded with firewood which, Chinese fashion, was being driven from behind.

It was the coolie habit of driving animals from behind with a stick, instead of leading them with a rope, that saved the day for Peter. The legs of the Chinaman in attendance appeared behind the pack to the right, Peter instinctively dodged to the left, and as the space was narrow he ducked under the clumsy load. As the horse's rump and the ragged end of the firewood passed him he caught a glimpse of the driver. It was Ne Ah Bo.

Fortunately the peddler went by with his attention on the load, and Peter, surprised out of all caution, stood stock still and stared. Then he melted into the shadow of the wall. Ne Ah Bo did not look round; he continued to steady the load with his hand until he reached the door that Peter had just left. There he pulled up.

Peter dodged out of sight. Ne Ah Bo and the Mongol under the same roof as the dignified Asiat! Such luck was scarcely to be believed. He danced on his bandaged foot.

But only for a moment, for the problem in front of him was far from being solved. He slowed up and stopped. How to get into the house to search it without being caught? Ne Ah Bo and his Mongol knew him too well for it to be safe to beg. He ground his teeth with baffled impatience. Here, for days he had waited and

watched, and now seemingly he must wait and watch again indefinitely, until by some chance the coast was clear. The prospect exasperated him, and rather than accept it without a struggle he crept back to the corner for another look.

In the interval the horse had been taken some distance up the alley and Ne Ah Bo and the Mongol were unloading the pack together.

Peter sucked in his breath. At least that would give him a chance to look inside the house. He would offer to sell his gold to the dignified Asiat—certainly he purchased gold from the Blue-eyed One, therefore why not from such as he?

It was then that his saint whispered caution. "Such as thee, durak, with no shirt and walking with a crutch—from whom wouldst thou procure gold?" And Peter with his hand actually on his buckskin sack bethought him, instead, of his chickens, which in all the excitement he had forgotten.

He stuck his sack back into its hiding place. "Fit only to stay with the women!" he jeered at himself, and without the loss of another moment, hurried to the street door through which he had seen the Asiat disappear.

He knocked, and when no one answered he gently opened the door and looked inside.

Lisa had taught him that when begging it was wisest to wait humbly on the threshold, and he stopped there. Not, however, because he was consciously a beggar but because he found himself in the immediate presence of the High-born One.

The dignified old man was seated on the bed. It was

such a bed as is found in all poor Chinese houses, a long low shelf, which occupied most of the interior and offered sufficient accommodation for all comers. Except for a charcoal burner and a shrine, it was the only furniture in the room.

Peter swept in everything at a glance while the old man was raising his eyes from his book and his heart began to pound violently.

It was not the old man, however, that set his heart pounding—it was the volume he was reading—for it was none other than his Barin's notebook.

There, within a few feet of him . . . the end of his quest. . . .

In the second that it took him to grasp the fact, the old man looked up, and with one slender forefinger inserted between the pages, spoke to him in faultless Russian. "Thou hast something to sell?"

Peter shuffled forward. "Chickens, Barin—all I have left!" He held them out, making an excuse to get within reach.

The Asiat observed him quietly before his eyes shifted to the chickens. Peter moved closer still . . . one long step and he could snatch the precious book. . . .

But he did not take the step. He did not dare, for Ne Ah Bo's Mongol appeared in the doorway, almost at the old man's elbow—without moving he could have picked Peter off the ground and broken his back.

The boy knew it, and like a bird fascinated in the presence of a snake he stood where he was. He moved only enough to hide his face. For the rest he trusted to his rags.

"Three roubles for both, Barin! then I can go home without a beating." Lisa would have been proud of his whine.

The Asiat made a sign, and the Mongol took the birds but did not go away. He stood just as still as Peter while the old man handed over the money.

With his forefinger still marking the place in Orlof's notebook, and with eyes that seemed aware of nothing and yet saw everything, the High-born One waited until Peter had mumbled a blessing and hobbled away on his crutch.

The majesty of the old Asiat and the brute strength of the Mongol had beaten him.

CHAPTER V

FRIENDLY ENEMIES

OUT on the street Peter tasted defeat. . . .

To have been actually within reach of his Barin's notebook, and yet not dare to snatch it and run!

It was not that he accused himself of cowardice, for he sensed that it was the old Asiat's eyes as much as the Mongol's fist that had driven him away. That such a one should have sent Ne Ah Bo as a spy into the taiga, to follow Boris Evanovich, gave the map an importance which almost frightened him, for his intuitions leaped forward far beyond his understanding and branded this high-born Asiat as an enemy.

Not only an enemy of his Barin but of everyone who had dreamed of the day when Russia would be strong. He felt himself in the presence of a force that could crush him far more effectually than a fist, and he realized with a stab of understanding that, insignificant as he was, his drinking and his gold thieving had started a chain of undreamed-of results. It was the same as throwing a stone into a pond. The ripples went on endlessly.

His instinct was to run, and to keep on running until he was lost. It was strong enough to take him out of Chinatown and on beyond the Stranger's lodgings, before his peasant tenacity pulled him up.

"Chort! Of a certainty one was born a fool," he grumbled to himself. "When a hishnik is driven out, he hides in the taiga only until it is safe to return; all the stinking officials in the country cannot keep him from stealing gold. And a beggar is but spat on and forgotten, wherefore one may still talk to this Asiat with long nails!—it is only necessary to wait until the lousy Mongol is asleep."

It was partly a bluff to keep up his spirits, but it sufficed to turn his steps back into Chinatown. He would make himself familiar with every movement within the house, and wait his chance until the Mongol went out.

He did not succeed in finding a hiding place, however, for he ran into the blue-eyed Stranger who seemed to be on a like errand. At least for an hour the Stranger wandered up and down the street, while Peter haunted the alley vainly waiting for him to go.

At the end of an hour the Chinaman came out and walked away toward the square. The Stranger followed him at a distance, and Peter, remembering the Mongol's fist, went after them. At least he might discover something interesting about this tiresome Stranger who was always getting in his way.

The procession moved from one street to another and came, ultimately, to the square, but it seemed that it was not Peter's lucky day, for just as the Chinaman turned into the alley beside his old lookout, Lisa dashed out of the crowd and fastened on his arm.

She was as welcome as a horsefly and Peter would willingly have slapped her, but there it was, she was a girl —and moreover, the storm in her eyes warned him.

She pulled him into a corner, scolding him. "Bad one,

thou hast lied! Was it not agreed that thou wouldst beg in kitchens? Thou art lazy or else——" She looked at him sulkily. "One is a thief, Petroushka, if one does not divide fairly."

Peter made soothing noises, only in the end to produce a slice of his remaining cash so big that it made him wince. "Lisaetta"—his smile was full of sorrow—"one tires of fat old women in kitchens, they talk so endlessly. One thought only of thee!"

Lisa sighed like a contented dog. "There is a steamer whistling, Petroushka! We will meet it on the dock, it is a good place to beg." And as by now the Stranger and the Chinaman had disappeared beyond hope, Peter agreed.

On the dock the lame girl went begging, but Peter wandered away to where he could see the river. He had seen nothing but houses for a long time and he was homesick for open country.

He looked sulkily at a rowboat half a mile downstream and he made plans to rid himself of the girl. Then he noticed that the gray police boat was again anchored at the mouth of the Zeya. It gave him an angry feeling.

A minute later he caught sight of the Stranger sitting on a bale, with nothing to do apparently but stare at the rowboat.

Peter had stared at it himself long enough to know that it contained two men, one of them rowing, the other sitting in the stern—two mujiks, probably, coming to the city to get drunk. The Stranger seemed interested and Peter made use of his preoccupation to slip away.

He went unnoticed, for the Stranger continued to watch the rowboat until it fetched up at a small landing

stage which was a continuation of the dock. Here the occupants got out.

The one in the stern had the appearance of a village storekeeper, the other seemed to be his servant, for he pulled the boat out of the water and put it in the care of the watchman, after which they climbed the ladder onto the main dock.

By this time the steamer was unloading and, as was natural for villagers, they stood looking curiously at the commotion. As they did so, the Stranger stretched himself, yawned, and started to walk off toward the town.

Almost at once the new arrivals left the dock also, following the Stranger at a distance until he came to the house where he lodged. Here he went in. The others walked on to the corner, as though to make sure the street was deserted, then they came back and approached the house.

The Stranger met them at the door. After carefully closing it, he saluted the storekeeper. "Good-evening, Excellency! I hope you are not tired?"

"Not 'Excellency' for the present!" the Governor corrected, glancing at the door into the kitchen. "As for being tired, that is a trifle if the report is good."

Nakeetin bowed. "If any report is good that concerns Tsing Feng! He is here, disguised as a small trader, but though I have watched him for a week I have not discovered the business that has brought him to Blagovestchensk."

"All the Secret Service in Russia will not discover that, my friend!" the Governor answered dryly. "Neverthe-

less I have made this long journey that I may talk to him alone, so much at least I hope for."

"It can be arranged," Nakeetin answered confidently. "One does not doubt that he knows your every movement since you left Chita, even as he doubtless knows that I have followed him for a week. And yet he has taken no precaution to hide, Barin. Why is that—unless it is that he had been awaiting your coming?"

"Go for him at once," the Governor ordered, "and assure him of safe conduct."

Peter, for want of an excuse, found himself obliged to walk home with Lisa. The girl was getting to be a lovesick nuisance, but he curbed his impatience and allowed her to bring him his supper while he thought over what he would do. Presently he bethought him that Asiats believed in devils and kept candles in their windows to drive them away. Perhaps by watching through the windows at night he might see the notebook again, without being seen, and even get a chance to steal it. He was a little afraid of devils himself, but as he was desperate he decided that he must brave them. Just how he would avoid being caught he must leave to chance.

Meanwhile he concentrated on Lisa. He easily enticed her into the shed and presently, as though just remembering something, he exclaimed: "*Ach te Gospodi!* There are the chickens!"

Lisa was sitting close beside him. "What chickens, Petroushka?" She snuggled closer still.

"Did I not promise to deliver two for Sunday, and here I talk to thee and forget!"

Lisa sighed happily. "To-morrow, being Sunday, we will go to church together. . . ."

Peter's thoughts raced. "And to-night I will buy thee a holiday handkerchief, because thou hast taught me to beg!"

It was almost equal to a betrothal and Peter jumped off the box quickly before she could say anything in reply. "Give me the chickens, little one, and I will deliver them at once."

She helped him kill them, and while she was tying them together he took the opportunity to slip his kinjal under his coat.

Lisa was excited, almost impatient for him to go. "I will wait for thee at the gate!" she whispered. "And if I am asleep thou must wake me." She watched him until he was out of sight.

When it was safe he began to run. As he had no intention of delivering the chickens until he had looked into the Chinaman's windows, he passed the Stranger's house without going in. And he forgot the handkerchief so utterly that he did not think of it again for a number of days, for when at last he reached his destination and screwed up his courage sufficiently to look through the window, there was the old Asiat sitting on the end of the bed, with the Mongol standing beside him and the Stranger himself in the middle of the room. The Blue-eyed One was talking.

In a moment, the Mongol disappeared and the Chinaman stood up, and then Peter saw that he held the notebook in his hand. If the Stranger saw it also, it meant nothing to him, for he merely held open the door and

waited for the Asiat to pass through, which gave Peter time to duck for cover before the two emerged and started to walk along the street together like friends.

Now, of a certainty, he knew that they trafficked in stolen gold! He settled down to follow them—or rather to follow his Barin's notebook—until daylight if necessary. But at the Stranger's lodgings they stopped and went inside.

It was what Peter had expected, and thirty seconds after they closed the door he was in the yard with his face glued against the window.

What he saw confirmed his suspicions. A village storekeeper, doubtless with gold dust bought from hishniks, which the long-nailed Asiat would smuggle across the boundary into Manchuria!—The Blue-eyed One was the go-between, and the tall one was servant to the storekeeper. Simple enough for a baby to understand!

At this point the storekeeper turned round and Peter saw a face that had troubled him before. The old man from the police boat! But such a one would not traffic in gold. . . .

Gospodi! Could it be that all this secrecy concerned the notebook?

This was a new thought, and it staggered Peter, especially when the Chenovnik from the police boat ordered the two other men out of the room—was it not well known that officials were careful about speaking in front of witnesses who later might be bribed? With a fresh stab of conscience the boy realized to what depths he had betrayed his trust, for officials were the common enemy.

The two men sat down, and immediately the Asiat pro-

duced the notebook and laid it beside him on the table. Here, then, was proof! Peter ground his teeth, then quickly ducked for cover, for Nakeetin and Stenka came out into the yard. He watched them walk together toward the gate.

Desperate as the situation was he never doubted now what he must do. He must tackle the two old men, while the Blue-eyed One and the servant guarded the street. What happened after was in the hand of God.

He crossed himself in search of wisdom, and his fingers entangled themselves in the cord that held the chickens. Chort! After all the way was plain—if he hurried—before the watchers came back. . . .

He whipped round the corner to the kitchen entry, out of sight of the gate, and entered casually as though he had a right to be there. "Thy chickens!" he said, and he plumped them down on the table as if he were in a hurry to go.

The woman was looking into the oven. "Shut that door, idiot, or my bread will spoil!" she said sourly. "So!—and thou art in a hurry!—It is all one, for am I not also busy? Put down thy chickens and wait for someone to come who will pay."

Peter was glad enough to be rid of the birds now that they had served his turn. The woman was again occupied with the contents of her oven and had momentarily forgotten him, so he slipped quietly round the table, intending to make a dash for it, but observing that the corner beside the door was curtained off with a sheet—a common enough arrangement in a peasant's house—he dived into it instead, there to await his chance.

It was well that he did so, for hardly had he disappeared from sight when Stenka the Cossack walked into the kitchen and took up his station, like a watchdog, where he could command the door into the front room.

Peter began to perspire. There was nothing to do now but wait and pray. Perhaps this tall servant would go out into the yard presently, to smoke. But Stenka was used to waiting, and he did not move.

In the front room His Excellency looked across the table at Tsing Feng. "Forty years is a long time, and yet I would have known you, my friend! One does not forget those hot-headed days of our youth. . . ."

Tsing Feng bowed. "I, too, have followed your distinguished career and congratulate the Tsar that he has such a man in his service!"

The Governor dismissed the compliment with a smile. "Our two countries have decreed that we remain enemies," he said with a note of sadness; "and destiny has decreed that I am to be on the winning side."

The Chinaman's long fingers caressed his beard with perfect composure. "Victory is sometimes written in sand . . . though I do not doubt that your railroad will be built, I believe, even so, it is destiny that the wheat fields of Manchuria remain with China."

If the Governor felt any surprise at Tsing Feng's knowledge of the projected railroad he showed none. "Quite so!" he said. "The railroad will be built; because Russia is supreme north of the river. That is why I am here to talk to my old friend, for if I can induce you to accept that fact it will save much annoyance to us both and also a great many lives."

Tsing Feng continued to stroke his beard. "A chain is as strong as its weakest link. It is not the strength of your armies on which Russia's future hangs, but the illiteracy of your peasants. Politically that spells revolution, and it is that which is the weakest link in your chain. Therefore it is that, in order to protect our future wheat fields, we raise this barrier of revolution against Russia's greatness, for only so can we hope to sap your present strength until we cease to fear you." His voice also took on a note of sadness. "The world does not understand these things, but we do. . . . We talked of such matters forty years ago . . . or have you forgotten?"

"One forgets nothing!" the Governor answered. "Revolution may come in China also before we die—of a certainty it will come in Russia. But who can foretell the time?—The railroad will be an accomplished fact within four years."

Tsing Feng raised his eyes. "What is a life-span—or a railroad? Our respective countries will snarl for a hundred years over the Manchurian wheat fields." His bow was as faultlessly Russian as his language and seemed to close the subject.

The Governor bowed also. "Ah, well! May I invite you to drink tea?" He clapped his hands and Stenka opened the kitchen door.

"The samovar!" . . . When they were alone he went on: "Some day the history of the Chinese Eastern Railway will be interesting reading. In a great measure it will be the history of Tsing Feng and the administrator of a Russian province, though our names will scarcely appear in the record. That is not important—what is important

is that nothing I can say will turn you from your life purpose. However . . . One has had the great pleasure of seeing you once more!"

Tsing Feng bowed low over his clasped hands. "Perhaps for the last time, for the enmity of our respective countries will keep us apart!"

And then Peter, watching through a crack of the door, saw Tsing Feng pick up Orlof's notebook. He did not, however, hear his next remark: "Your Excellency's engineer will have use for this!"

The Governor's look of surprise and complete want of understanding was lost in a sudden commotion behind him. For Peter—utterly reckless of consequences, and with no thought but the recovery of the book—burst from his hiding place, and with the spring of a bob-cat swooped down upon the object of his search. His momentum carried him between the two men before the Governor could turn round.

Tsing Feng never moved. His hand was poised over the table in the act of laying down the book. It remained so poised and empty after Peter was gone.

Immediately there was a crash in the kitchen doorway and Stenka was sitting on the floor with the samovar of boiling water rolling away from his feet. Peter's head had crashed into his stomach.

A woman's scream marked his progress through the kitchen, into the yard. An oath from Stenka echoed the woman's scream and he was gone after the intruder.

A shot was fired in the yard. And then came silence.

The Governor made a hissing noise through his teeth. "A typhoon struck us!" he began, but he stopped because

a wildly frightened woman rushed in from the kitchen. He dealt with her shortly: "That will do, Staroushka, bring another samovar!" And then turning to Tsing Feng: "I do not understand. Was the book you have lost of value to you?"

The Chinaman sat down. "It was valuable to your engineer. It contained the preliminary traverse of your new railroad. There was much profit to me in the perusal."

The Governor looked serious. "Then my engineer is dead?"

Tsing Feng shook his head. "Not even wounded, merely drugged! Probably by this time he waits Your Excellency at the appointed place. May I say I am sorry he will not have his notes!"

The Governor's acknowledgment was somewhat dry. "As usual you strike first! But my engineer will carry his information in his head, by hook or by crook we will yet contrive to build this road. It is possible, of course, that the shot we heard will have recovered the notes."

He sat down and produced cigarettes and they talked of other things, until Stenka came in with a fresh samovar. He shook his head in response to the Governor's look of inquiry.

Nakeetin did not return until after the Chinaman had gone. He gave his report briefly. "Escaped, Barin! Tsing Feng's work without a doubt. That young devil is a fake beggar who came in from the Zeya and has poked about Chinatown for days. With your permission I will have him in twenty-four hours."

To the Governor it was obviously revolutionary ac-

tivity, with which as it happened Tsing Feng had nothing to do, for the Chinaman was actually handing him the book when it occurred. He looked at his watch. "In twenty-four hours we will be a long way upstream. It is best at the moment not to stir up mud."

Nakeetin accepted his orders—it was his business to protect the Governor's incognito—but he had his own ideas. The boy was a revolutionary certainly, but without doubt in the pay of the Chinaman.

And Stenka, getting supper, registered a vow to break every bone in the body of the young good-for-nothing who had rammed him in the wind; while Lisa, though she watched till midnight, eventually cried herself to sleep. Peter had disappeared!

CHAPTER VI

FEENGA STANDS FAST

ON AN afternoon early in August, Feenga came out of the Foreigner's kitchen carrying a broom. Like all kitchens in well-to-do Siberian establishments it was separate from the main building, connected only by a passageway from the back porch. In the main building the Foreigner and his woman lived, and entertained those guests who were too important, or too intimate, to send to the guest house.

The mine that the Foreigner had developed had grown into a complete settlement—almost a village—with its church and its hospital, its retail store and big warehouse, and its quarters for several hundred workmen and their families. Chief among the many departments that belonged strictly to the mine was the mill, a great building standing a quarter of a mile away through the trees, in which machinery grumbled like a distant waterfall and which, even in the daytime, frightened Feenga because of its vastness and its noise.

Machinery to Feenga was a mystery, a thing apart, which concerned only men. Peter understood it of course. He had explained to her about ore breakers and electricity and methods of saving gold—but none of it could she remember if she tried. All she could remember was

the noise, which when she was close to it made her think of God.

Outside the kitchen door a rumble came to her now on the afternoon breeze, but she turned her back on it sulkily. She was unhappy and puzzled. How could God permit such things as these rumors about Peter, which made her so furious and ashamed? They weighed down the atmosphere of the big living room and reached her in disconnected sentences and even more significant silences when she appeared with the samovar.

They had begun with the appearance of Boris Evanovich, the Stranger with the scar, who had gone with Peter. He had come in from the taiga alone, and when Feenga had rushed to Anna Mihaelovna for news, the Barina's eyes were puzzled and sad.

"Patience, little one, he will be here presently. . . ." Then a moment of silence before she went on to other things.

And Scarface would not talk either—she had spoken to him in his bedroom when she took him his boots, but without result.

Then three other guests had arrived, on the evening after it rained. The big fat one had eyes like a pig, and a back so broad one could put out one's tongue with safety. But the old one with white hair who sometimes wore a uniform and sometimes dressed like an honest man was a kindly old dyadya, who crawled on the floor with little Mischa, and when he was not shut in the office with the Foreigner or Boris Evanovich, sat on the porch for hours at a time looking at Cloudy Peak.

The other one—the spare little man with blue eyes—

was over there by the blacksmith shop now, poking his nose into every last little thing, like a fox, just when she wanted to slip away for five minutes to listen to the bellows creaking and watch the fire, and perhaps forget for a time the heaviness that weighed her down.

She wanted Peter—and for the hundredth time she thought over what she would say when he came. He should be made to talk, openly and at length. She would suffer none of these knowing silences, as though she were nothing but a child. . . .

She had reached the front porch which she had been told to sweep. She dragged her broom listlessly to the farther end and rather deliberately looked in at the window of the Foreigner's office.

Boris Evanovich and the Governor were conferring with their heads close together, looking as though they had been there since lunch. The sight roused her suspicions at once and her broom moved with scarcely a sound, but even so she could not hear what they said. It did not improve her temper.

When Anna Mihaelovna came out with the baby she spoke to her twice before she got any response. "Feenga! The porch not swept, and still that dirty apron. I am not pleased."

Feenga responded with her stupidest stare, and Anna Mihaelovna, knowing the hopelessness of dealing with a peasant in such a mood, decided to ignore it. "Well, never mind! Take little Mischa out for an airing and I'll finish it myself."

Feenga exchanged the broom for the baby as though it were all one, and set off slowly down the path. She was

still in sight when Stephen Wyld joined his wife on the porch.

"I do wish Feenga could be taught not to carry the infant straddled across her hip," Joan said with a little laugh. "It does look so native."

"They all do it, and it doesn't seem to hurt the kid," Stephen answered. "But what has got into Feenga lately? I haven't heard her singing for a week."

Joan made a little movement of sympathy. "It's loyalty to Peter, I suspect. She's been wearing his handkerchief as a sort of flag ever since Boris Evanovich came back alone. You see, Feenga and I don't doubt that Peter will be able to explain."

Stephen Wyld smiled thoughtfully. "I'm backing Peter, too—I'll get to the bottom of the mess in five minutes when I talk to him. Have you told Feenga not to worry? He'll get back all right."

"She's not worrying—she's angry!" Joan corrected. "Angry at all this heavy silence, and the odds and ends of remarks she hears. I'm rather mystified myself by all this sitting about in dark corners; it isn't as though his dear old Excellency were worried by such a trifle as Peter. He doesn't know he exists."

Stephen laughed. "Governing a province furnishes worry enough to account for most things; and a Slav is apt to be a trifle mysterious anyway. They are so used to secret service, and rumors of revolution, and political intrigue, and so on. You remember when Orlof came along with that letter in the spring? He was under secret orders of some sort then. They always are; that yarn about map making was probably a blind to satisfy Peter. It didn't

fool me. There are all the signs of a big political game getting under way. I've wondered sometimes if they are going to put the railroad through to the coast."

"The railroad!" Joan's eyes shone. "How exciting!"

"Fine for us!" Stephen agreed. "But better not even think of it if you value your head. The old man has come down here to confer with Orlof on the quiet—probably to dodge the rumors that are flying round Chita. If I'm right about the railroad he will make some sort of official announcement before long—after the whole taiga knows!"

Joan laughed. "In the meantime I'd better sweep this porch before the conference in the office comes to an end."

Feenga looking back from the turn in the trail and seeing the two on the porch conferring together assumed at once they were talking of her, for her conscience was not clear. She set the baby down on the grass and examined her apron critically. "There it is!—" she said sternly, "fit for nothing but a girl who is minding pigs." With a determined frown she turned it round with the dirty side in. Then as the baby was gurgling at her she picked it up, and with a fierce little rush cuddled its head against her neck. "Feenga's little crumb of bread! See, I will carry thee nearer to the noise, it will give thee a tickling in thy toes."

She went as close as she dared in the absence of Peter and stared at the huge building, which rose, tier on tier, up to the rock crushers at the mouth of the mine. Her face was as solemn as the baby's. Peter understood what went on inside . . . some day he would be an educated

one—almost a barin—while she would be fit only for his kitchen . . . a baba without teeth, one who would look after his babies and drink tea in the corner by the stove.

The picture made her deliciously sad. She sighed so profoundly that Mischa looked at her with wise eyes and pushed his fingers into her mouth; but she was not attending, and discovering the fact he kicked vigorously and tried to struggle out of her arms.

"Be still, little rabbit!" she ordered sternly, and set him securely astride of her hip. "Thou art like thy father, one who will have his own way instantly. Nonetheless thou art to come with Feenga for a walk, or Joan"—she pronounced it "Djon"—"will speak to me!"

She set off through a grove of birch trees, beautiful as a park, and in five minutes came to the top of a grassy knoll which commanded an uninterrupted view far down the valley to the first great shoulder of Cloudy Peak. She allowed Mischa to slip from her hip as absent-mindedly as one puts down a bundle, then stood for a full minute looking straight in front of her at the wagon road.

Every afternoon when it was possible she came to this spot. Not, consciously, because of the beauty of the view, but because she knew that on the appointed day Peter would come home along the wagon road below her. Just why she was so sure he would come by this particular road she did not know, except that within her experience everybody came and went on the big waterway, and the road in front of her came up from the river.

But to-day the valley revealed nothing more exciting than a number of mine horses grazing on the flats. Even

so, Feenga slowly took in every detail before she sat down, and for a long minute afterward she brooded silently, her chin tucked in her hands.

Then with a sigh of resignation she turned from the view and gave the Foreigner's offspring just enough attention to take some grass out of his mouth, after which she forgot him utterly. For now she took a book from the pocket of her apron and spread it out on her knee.

This was Feenga's great secret . . . shared only with Anna Mihaelovna and the Foreigner. She was learning to read.

Not a day passed but the waste basket was overhauled for scraps of paper that would do to write on; not a week went by that Stephen Wyld did not lose a pencil. And over and over again when Joan needed Feenga she would find her hidden away, her book on her lap, and one stubby finger tracing its way, word by word, across the much-thumbed page.

At the end of a month Joan had spoken of it to Stephen. "Did I tell you that Feenga and I share a dark secret together? With my able assistance she is learning to read."

Stephen grinned. "I'm another conspirator, but I promised secrecy—she seems sensitive on the point. 'A *girl* learning to read, think of such a thing Barin! People will laugh.'"

"I know," Joan interrupted. "And she learns so fast! Don't ever tell me these peasants aren't intelligent."

"Most of them are intelligent enough," Stephen answered, "and the young ones have a thirst for knowledge that is pathetic, it's almost a religion—that, and the cry

for more land. If the revolution ever comes it'll be for those two things as much as for anything else."

"When I think of Peter and Feenga," Joan mused, "I sometimes wonder if we couldn't start a school. Would it be allowed?"

"No," Stephen answered, "not without a permit, which we couldn't get. But in Russia there are always ways. . . ."

Feenga had evidently found her way, for she read on with puckered brows until her back ached from sitting still. To ease it she spread herself full length on the ground, and began writing words on a scrap of paper.

Rapidly she wrote her own name: *Feenga:*—then *Peter: Anna:* but when she tried to spell "Mihaelovna" it was too difficult, and she wrote *Mischa* instead. It seemed to remind her of her charge, for she sat up rather guiltily to look for him.

He had crawled a little distance down the slope and was sitting contentedly with his back to her, busy with his own affairs.

She left her book in the grass and went to him. "Ach, so!—little pest—must thou always eat grass like a cow?"

Mischa opened his mouth for inspection but what was in it remained undisturbed, for over his head Feenga caught sight of something moving. She gave one startled look, then the infant was once more astride her hip and she was speeding through the grass—to meet Peter.

No matter how great the distance she could never mistake that step. He was coming up the trail with a certain dogged persistence as though he was without enthusiasm to be home. Perhaps he was tired, for he had covered the

distance from the river in two days, which was no mean undertaking.

Feenga waved and shouted, then broke into a wild run, until the baby decided it was a game and crowed with delight. But though Peter saw them he continued to trudge along the road at the same dogged pace.

Except for a certain smoldering eagerness in the first long glance, the meeting was almost as casual as though they had not been separated for more than an hour.

"Petroushka—thou hast come!"

"Noo—Feenga!"

And then the Foreigner's heir interrupted by wriggling himself free of Feenga's hip. For safety she hoisted him into her arms. "See, already he knows thee, the duckling!"

The baby made noises suggestive of friendship and Peter, grinning, gathered him in. Feenga hovered close, making darting movements to straighten his dress and Peter's coat, then she stood off and looked Peter over.

"Thou hast lost a shoe," she remarked dispassionately.

Peter's shrug admitted it. "One has come far, there was not time to find another."

The remark seemed simple enough, yet it increased their shyness. A barrier of unasked questions kept them both silent.

Peter broke it with a rush. "Is Stepan Stepanovich at the mine?" It was the question he had asked himself a countless number of times. If he could once explain to the Foreigner, perhaps it would make it easier to confess to Boris Evanovich.

Feenga nodded eagerly. And then with a quick change

of expression added: "There are visitors—also Scarface! Ah, Peter, what hast thou done?"

Peter drooped until his face was partially hidden behind the baby's curls. "One got drunk!" he said tragically.

Feenga's eyes stormed. "Drunk! thou useless good-for-nothing——!"

Yet in spite of the scorn in her voice she looked at him with a totally new interest. He was thinner, as she had discovered at the first glance; but he was also subtly older. More of a man. A different Peter from the one she had known.

She moved closer and looked at him again. "He did not say thou wast drunk!"

Peter looked miserable. "What did he say, Feenga?"

With a rush she unburdened her whole heart. "Anna Mihaelovna is sad, and the Foreigner looks severe, so that one is afraid—and Scarface is a rat, he says nothing at all. Tf-oo-ee! But one has believed nothing, Petroushka. One has waited only for thee. Come, we will go to Scarface and tell him to his face that he lies."

Peter did not kindle. "Nonetheless it is true. One has broken one's trust."

For a moment Feenga looked frightened; then her head went up. She took the baby out of his arms. "I will get thee a clean shirt and thou wilt ask forgiveness. If he is truly a barin he will know that thou art nothing but a boy. Presently it will be forgotten."

Obviously Peter did not agree, but he had promised to talk to no one and to explain to Feenga would only betray

his trust still further. He walked beside her in silence until they came to the porch. Here Feenga stopped.

"We will take the little one also, for Scarface likes him."

Peter's manner suggested that in such a case both women and babies would be out of place. "Thou wilt wait in the kitchen," he said, and stepped up onto the porch. He paused barely long enough to knock on the office door and went in.

Feenga watched the door close, then she kissed the infant excitedly. What did she care? He had come back!

CHAPTER VII

A LESSON IN FAIR PLAY

THERE were two people in the office when Peter entered, but it seemed dark inside, and he saw only Orlof who sat with his back toward him, near the door. The Governor was buried in the depths of an armchair, which was half hidden behind a large central table littered with papers and maps, and in the middle of which stood an unlighted lamp further obstructing the view. Thus it was that Peter saw only Boris Evanovich.

He made one step toward him. "Barin—I have come back!"

The Governor raised his head for barely a moment. Orlof stood up, obviously surprised, and for several seconds looked Peter over, taking in all the ragged details of his clothes, the improvised shoepack made out of a sack, the strained intentness of his face. He neither smiled a welcome nor frowned disapproval, neither did he seem in a great hurry to speak, for he put both hands in his pockets and moved a little so that he could lean more comfortably against the table. It brought him directly facing Peter and effectually hid the Governor from view.

"So thou hast come back!" The remark was so casual that Peter might have been away only long enough to have picketed the horses.

The boy stood still, and rubbed his nose with the back

of his hand. "Yes, Barin . . . one could not come sooner for one had not recovered the book."

Orlof looked genuinely surprised now. "You recovered my notes? You found Ne Ah Bo? . . ."

Peter produced the notebook. "It is a long story, Barin. I followed him to Blagovestchensk, but there he was lost. Then my saint was good to me, Barin, for he showed me the way to a high-born Asiat who by great good fortune had stolen it from Ne Ah Bo. One stole it from him," he added simply, as though details would not be interesting.

For a moment Orlof turned his attention to the notes to see if harm had come to them; but Peter plunged ahead, a little more breathlessly now, for in the next minute he would know what he had come so far to hear.

"Barin, one asks forgiveness! . . ." Peasant fashion he would have knelt, but Orlof moved too quickly and as was proper between them put one hand on Peter's head.

It was the time-honored sign of good-will and the boy's eyes filled with tears.

Then astonishingly he found his right hand clasped, man to man, as an equal. "Thy little hour of madness has caused both of us a great deal of trouble, Petroushka, is it not so? But thou hast done a fine thing—thou hast come back like a true man. We will forget that such a thing happened. Is it agreed?"

At the moment Peter was beyond speech, but when he had gulped down his emotion sufficiently he made full confession. "Barin, the devil's work is not all told. Had one not been drunk the book would not have been stolen for one would have come to thee before Ne Ah Bo found

thee alone. But there is it, Barin . . . one was angry and ashamed . . . and the Asiat was cunning, he gave me vodka. When it was too late, Barin, I understood. Therefore I made a bargain with God, that should I recover the book, never again would I be drunk."

Orlof's hand went rather suddenly to his mouth. "Vodka makes trouble without ending, Petroushka!" And then he added gravely: "If thou wilt keep thy vow I also will keep mine—in a little while I will find thee a school."

This time nothing could keep Peter from getting down on his knees. It was not entirely a tribute to his Barin, it was also a thank-offering that the consequences of his folly in turning hishnik had slipped from him.

"Ah, my Barin, I will not forget—and except only as the Foreigner will need me I will help thee put every hilltop in the taigo on thy map. See, I cross myself three times. . . ."

And then sitting comfortably back on his heels, his long suppressed lightness of heart began to return.

"I went as a beggar in Blagovestchensk, and sold chickens! One followed the high-born Asiat from place to place in Chinatown, until in the end he went into a house. There he talked to a lousy old official from the police boat, one who had come disguised in village clothes, and he was about to sell him thy book. But it made for nothing at all, for I was too quick for the pair of them—when the moment came I grabbed it and was gone. The lousy old official——"

Orlof made a move as though to stop him, but the narrative was in full flight.

"One fired a shot at me, but that too made for nothing. Duraks! Had they but known it I carried with me gold I had taken in the hishnik camp!"

The mention of the gold gave his thoughts a more serious twist. "See, Barin, I give it to thee, as a sign that I do not forget. For me it is pogani, for did it not cause me to forget my trust!"

He moved to the table and produced his buckskin sack. Orlof made no motion to take it. "Stolen gold belongs to the government," he said. "Thou canst not give it to me because it is not thine."

Peter's fingers closed over the sack, much as a dog's paw shoots out to protect its bone. "Barin, such a thing is not according to God! One would wish thee to buy thyself a new horse, for the one I took with me was sold to buy food."

"Even so it belongs to the government," Orlof reiterated. "If thou art to go to school thou must understand such things."

Peter hung his head. Perhaps it was the hardest part of his lesson, for it struck deeply at his hishnik tradition. "For me it is pogani!" he said again, under his breath, and with a sigh of resignation he moved away from the buckskin sack.

It brought him face to face with His Excellency who, at that moment, sat forward in his chair.

"Well, young man!" he said—"So we meet again. This is very interesting for me."

Peter recoiled as though he had been struck.

To talk freely in the presence of an official was something no peasant could be forced to do under any circum-

stances—and Boris Evanovich had permitted him to babble of secret things in the hearing of this great one. The situation was frankly beyond him and he looked from one to the other in utter confusion.

Boris Evanovich seemed in no way disturbed. "He is *my* Barin, Petroushka!" he said. "He sent me to make the map. If he questions thee thou must answer truly."

Peter's face became wooden with seeming stupidity. "What do I know, Barin?"

For a hundred years that phrase had been the peasant's defense against the arbitrary dealings of preying officials. But it served Peter for a heartbeat only, for regardless of consequences the blood of his Cossack ancestry, coupled with his outraged sense of betrayal, drove him to speech.

"Barin, art thou also an official?"

Orlof nodded.

"Chort! . . . Tf-oo-ee. . . !" A torrent of angry words was checked only by an even stronger instinct to bolt. The room with its two officials had suddenly become a trap.

"Peter!" His Excellency did not raise his voice. He did not even speak with unusual insistence, but he easily dominated both the man and the boy. "Peter, why dost thou hate all officials?"

Peter's anger overflowed all barriers. "They killed my father."

His Excellency's voice was gentle. "Ah, the pity of such things! Who killed thy father?"

"The Black Devil of the Amazar."

The Governor looked puzzled and turned to Orlof. "The Black Devil? . . ."

Orlof explained. "He speaks of Grubof, the head official of the district who was killed by the peasants in the trouble after the war."

"That man! Did he kill thy father himself?"

Peter hesitated. "How can one tell who fired the shot? Who else but the Black Devil ordered it?"

The Governor looked at him. "Grubof ordered it and someone carried out his orders; therefore thou dost hate all officials—is it not so? That is a poor reason, Peter, for I have just heard thine own story. Thou wert willing to lie and beg, to break into houses, perhaps even to kill, in order to bring back a book to Boris Evanovich. Art thou greatly different from an official who has also sworn to fulfil his trust?"

Peter's throat worked but he said nothing, and in a moment the Governor asked him another question. "Why dost thou, a hishnik's son, so greatly desire to go to school?"

"That some day one may be the Foreigner's headman."

"And why dost thou wish this thing?"

Peter's head went up. "Because he taught me to read and all through my childhood I have eaten his bread. But being a foreigner there are things he cannot learn. Do not the mujiks steal his tools and his gold, and the foremen steal both from him and from the workmen as well? They lie to cover their own laziness. But a peasant understands a peasant and when one becomes his headman one will know what to do."

"Why does he not see to it that all his foremen are honest?"

Peter looked almost contemptuous. "Where will he find such foremen? The saying is that most peasants are thieves."

The Governor nodded. "I see! His foremen steal and drink, and doubtless they beat his workmen also, they are careless and allow men to get killed in the mine, but thou dost not blame the Foreigner for such things, rather dost thou seek to protect him. Yet when some small official is a rascal thou dost blame all officials equally for his evil deeds."

"One must not blame the Foreigner, Barin, he does not know."

"Many years ago some man killed thy father. Therefore thou dost spit at Boris Evanovich because he happens to wear the uniform of the Tsar. That is not fair, Peter! Also, I have no doubt thou would spit at me if thou wert not afraid. Dost thou know who I am?"

"The Chenovnik from the police boat, Barin. More than that I do not know."

"And all Chenovniks from police boats are pogani, is it not so?" His Excellency's voice was very quiet now. "And yet, Peter, I am the Governor. Perhaps thou hast heard of such an one?"

Peter turned to Orlof without attempting to hide his surprise. "The great one who is sent by the Tsar?"

Boris Evanovich nodded. "I am in the service of His Excellency," he said. "Did I not say in the beginning that I served Russia?"

Perhaps he would have said more, but the Governor

rose out of his chair and came round the table. As he approached Peter the boy again showed signs of going down on his knees, but His Excellency stopped him by placing a hand on his shoulder.

"My son, an old man would talk to thee! Many years ago the Tsar did my ancestors a great kindness. Therefore my family have served Russia gladly, even as thou dost desire to serve Stepan Stepanovich. Surely that is easy for thee to understand! But just as the Foreigner's foremen are, on occasion, untrustworthy, so it is hard even for a governor to find officials who are at all times true men. Bad ones are to be found in all callings; thy father's enemy, Black Grubof, was one of these.

"But he is dead and it is part of my trust to undo as far as may be the evil that he did. I am going to send thee to school in Chita. Boris Evanovich shall attend to it, and from time to time he will bring me a report. When thou art educated thou shalt be free to go where thou wilt. Thou canst come back to the Foreigner, or stay with Boris Evanovich and serve Russia. It shall be just as thou choosest; only remember—to be educated is itself a trust, for before all other things Russia is in need of educated men. Dost thou understand?"

Peter was absorbed. He had forgotten it was an official who spoke to him.

"What do I know, Excellency?" Again the time-honored phrase, with a little stumble over the unfamiliar title, but this time the boy was not pretending stupidity.

"Always I have hated Chenovniks, Barin, but thou art a great one who understands. If it is permitted one

would wish to talk of such things after one has been to school."

The Governor smiled. "We will leave it so, Peter."

He stood erect as though he were on parade, while Peter saluted and backed out of the door.

"There goes young Russia!" he said. "If we could but educate a million of them . . ." And then with a shrug: "What will the young timber wolf do with his education?"

"Quite likely he will become a revolutionary," Orlof answered.

His Excellency returned to his chair and sat down. "Even so I would educate a million of them, for when the revolution comes the future of Russia will be in their hands."

CHAPTER VIII

THE HERDER OF PIGS

THE Foreigner's kitchen was built on the same plan as practically every kitchen in Siberia. A large commodious room with a cooking stove and a bake oven at the end farthest from the door, and a chicken coop running the full length of the room, making a convenient seat. As no self-respecting peasant woman would live without chickens, which in winter must be kept warm, even Joan with her foreign ideas of housekeeping had come to accept them as part of the scheme.

Behind the cook stove a small window overlooked the front porch, and by standing on a box Feenga could see a number of things that went on there without being seen. Those interesting last-minute conversations between the Foreigner and his wife, when he left the house for the day; the strangely formal gestures of visiting officials at the moment of arrival; the hesitant uncertainty of workmen who, for one reason or another, were called to the office at the end of the porch. Feenga could guess by Anna Mihaelovna's manner whether the Foreigner was going away for an hour or a day, just as she could tell, by watching, whether a foreman had been caught stealing or was merely coming for his pay. It was a favorite pastime of hers to dawdle at the window and make up stories about each group that appeared on the porch.

When she left Peter to go alone to his momentous conference with Boris Evanovich she was not anxious. No one could doubt Peter when he looked into their eyes! But even so, when she reached the kitchen she gave the Foreigner's offspring a lump of sugar to keep him quiet and mounted her box.

It was a long vigil, interrupted at intervals by the cook who was preparing supper, and by Feenga herself who remembered that Peter was in need of a clean shirt and a great deal of soap and water before he would be fit to appear in Anna Mihaelovna's room. Without doubt Anna Mihaelovna would call for him as soon as she learned that he had returned.

When at last Peter did appear Feenga was mystified, for he stood with his head up staring across the valley as though he had never seen it before. Once or twice he shrugged his shoulders and laughed, or so it appeared, and it was plain that he had forgotten the very existence of the kitchen and his clean shirt.

Feenga began to pout. Did he suppose she would wait for him all night? She descended from her box, and remembering that her apron was dirty changed it for the best one she could find. Not that Peter would know it from a sack, but it made her feel better. She combed her hair, too, before the mirror, and retied her handkerchief with a great deal of care. Then she looked for the tongs to put charcoal into the samovar, but the cook was using them so she climbed up onto her box again while she was waiting.

Peter was standing in the road now, talking to Stepan Stepanovich, and Feenga forgot about the charcoal tongs,

for it was a new Petroushka that she saw. The peasant boy she was accustomed to, who stood in the presence of his Barin with becoming humbleness, had changed into a quite different Peter. One who gesticulated freely, laughed, and threw up his head. He was older—almost a man already—and quite amazingly at his ease. And the Foreigner listened to him attentively as to one who had something important to say.

They began strolling backward and forward, like friends, and presently Anna Mihaelovna joined them. Feenga heard her laugh and saw her put her arm around Peter's shoulders. Then the strolling began again, backward and forward, the three of them talking intimately.

When the cook called her from the window, Feenga drew the curtain, and because she felt lonely she sang to herself, through her nose, dropping the live charcoal into the samovar as she did so.

"Sasha . . . My darling Sasha! . . .
Thou art wonderfully dear to me . . ."

It gave her a deliciously sad feeling. All her life, she supposed, she would look after other people's babies, until she was too old to have any teeth. . . . And why not? She was only a herder of pigs. . . .

She changed the infant's dress over against the time when Anna Mihaelovna would claim him.

When Peter strolled in, it was exactly as if he had never been away. He tossed his cap onto the coop, and looked carelessly at the two women.

"Gospodi! One has talked oneself hungry. . . ."

But Feenga was not to be put off so easily. Behind the indifferent manner, Peter's eyes smoldered and his feet found it difficult not to dance. She hoisted the infant astride her hip to give herself a feeling of maturity.

"Byedda! Now that thy darling Djon has put an arm round thy neck, one supposes thou wilt eat with the high-born!" She advanced on him, swaying from the hips, and slid her forearm daintily round his neck. Her head snuggled a moment, then recoiled. "Pish, little one! Thou smellest worse than a polecat."

Peter seized her round the waist, baby and all. "One has not washed for a month. But such a thing makes for nothing at all! There is soap and a clean shirt, hot soup and bread, and thee, Feenga—and the little one—and old Staroushka there by the stove, waiting this long while to be kissed——" He broke free and kissed her, dodged when she would have slapped him, and nearly upset the samovar. Then he bore down on Feenga again: "Gospodi! There is talk boiling inside me that will make thine ears wag like a mule." He snapped his fingers—posturing—inviting her to dance.

She deposited the baby under the table and they were off, with the Old One keeping time by beating with the tongs. In the midst of it Joan came in, to see why supper was late. But she did not interrupt, until Peter saw her and stopped.

"Ah, Barina!—Now that everything is explained how could one not dance?"

Joan rescued her offspring. "Certainly one must dance, but also one has visitors! And Peter, there is a clean

shirt waiting—also Boris Evanovich would talk to thee again presently."

When she had gone, with the Old One behind her carrying the soup, Peter became portentously serious. "Feenga, old White-head is a great one—a High Excellency—*the Governor himself!*"

Feenga sniffed. "If that old man is a governor then I myself am the Grand Duchess Olga Nicholaiovna! Wash thyself, dirty one, without more talk, or I will scrub thee like an Easter pig!"

She pushed him into the corner behind the oven where the wash basin sat on a shelf. After waiting a moment she went to the mirror and straightened her hair with vicious little dabs. Her patience had exhausted itself. "Boris Evanovich would talk to thee again, Peter . . ." Well and good! But this time he would talk to both of them or she would attend to it.

She laid her plans carefully. After supper she told the Old One such a tale that she went off to the men's quarters to investigate the truth. Then without a glance at Peter, who still loitered over the first good meal he had had in a month, she slipped out of the kitchen and went in search of Orlof.

She found him alone in the office, poring over his map. When he took no notice of her she brought an extra candle and set it beside his hand. "Barin, is it permitted to speak?"

He looked up. "Where is Peter? I am waiting for him."

Feenga nodded with animation and moved closer, as though to take him into her confidence. "Barin, one has

come to ask a favor! In the kitchen there is a samovar, and little cakes that I have baked, and the Old One is gone for an hour. It will be a great honor if thou wouldst come!"

Orlof sat back in his chair and looked at her.

"A little holiday because Peter has come home!" she finished with a rush of eagerness.

"That is a great thought!" he remarked.

She followed up her advantage. "One had been lonely, and now that he is going to school he thinks of me as nothing but a herder of pigs. But it is not true, Barin! Anna Mihaelovna is teaching me to read—see, I can write thy name!"

Orlof watched her write *Boris* on the margin of his map. . . . "So thou art lonely without Peter!"

Feenga's eyes were luminous. "And why not, Barin? one has often been beaten because of him. . . ."

Orlof began drawing circles round the word she had written. "But there it is, little one, Peter is growing up to be a man! . . ."He looked across at her and gradually his pencil ceased to draw circles. "Well, Feenga, what is it thou hast come to say?"

Feenga's throat worked, for she had to summon all her courage to say to this well-born the thing that was nearest to her heart. She bolstered her determination with the remembrance that he had been kind to Peter, and had forgiven him a great sin. Just what that sin was she did not yet know, but in time she would learn. Peter's silence in the matter filled her with indignation, and aided her now to speak.

"Send me to school also, Barin!—Or, should such a

thing be in no way possible seeing that I am nothing but a girl, then allow me to serve in thy kitchen! Thou art a well-born, and by serving I may learn of thy woman. Here in the taiga it is different; one does not desire to go back to the pigs."

Orlof's pencil went to drawing circles again. "I am not married, Feenga; but Chita is a large city, surely between us we can find a place for thee. Possibly I know one who might listen if I were to tell her of thy ambition."

Feenga's eyes filled with tears. "Barin, I will make thee a holiday shirt—such a one that Peter would sell his Easter boots to wear! Barin, promise that it shall be so, and I will kiss thy hands and feet!"

"All in good time!" he laughed. "Thou canst begin thy stitching when I have found thee a place. Meantime there are cakes, and also Peter, waiting in the kitchen. Let us go."

Feenga tossed her head. "Peter is proud. Has he not been bursting with secrets these many days? We will tell him nothing at all, Barin, until by accident he meets me walking in the street!" She snapped her fingers: *"That for him!"*

Then she conducted her guest to the kitchen, with what she imagined was the manner of a high-born one, and scarcely deigned to notice Peter's existence until she had served Orlof with tea and cakes. After which she sat down sedately behind the samovar, as became a mere woman, and waited for the men to talk.

Orlof sipped his tea. "Russia is a great country, and one has seen most of it, but there is no place like a kitchen in which to drink tea! The smell of the oven reminds me

of my boyhood, sitting on the chicken coop listening to grown-up tales! I had an uncle who was captain of a steamer on the Yenisei, in the days before the railroad. There was a man for you! He could tell stories that would cause one to talk in one's sleep. He wished to make a sailor out of me; but like Peter here, who must have an education, I wished to become an engineer. I wanted to build a railroad, not to stand on the bridge of a steamer to the end of my days."

Peter began to kindle. "One has seen a locomotive, Barin; it must be a great thing to build a railroad!"

Orlof asked for some more tea. "Would you like to hear how a railroad is built?"

Feenga forgot she was a sedately behaved hostess and put both elbows on the table.

CHAPTER IX

THE GOVERNOR IS ENTERTAINED

HALF an hour later His Excellency, followed by Plotnikof the Secretary, came out of the living room. The Secretary went at once to the office, but the Governor loitered. The evening was still warm and the distant rumble of the mill mingled pleasantly with the night breeze. The valley was very peaceful and His Excellency felt disinclined to work. He strolled to the end of the porch.

There he encountered old Stenka the Cossack, who, though he was billeted with Nakeetin in the guest house, kept his usual watch. The Governor sighed, for the sight of the Cossack reminded him that he administered a province.

"Thou canst go to bed, Stenka——" he began, when a burst of laughter came from the direction of the kitchen. Two young voices laughing together, followed by the deeper bass of a man. His Excellency glanced wistfully at the lighted window. "What's going on there?" he asked.

"It is Boris Evanovich, Excellency, with the two young ones. They drink tea."

"Go to bed!" the Governor ordered, and resumed his strolling.

Each time the laughter in the kitchen came to him he

stopped to listen. He was doing so when Joan came out onto the porch. With a formal little bow he turned to her.

"To-morrow, Anna Mihaelovna, I take up again the affairs of state! But to-night I am a private citizen, enjoying your moonlight, and—and that!" He waved his hand toward the kitchen. "They are, one supposes, celebrating the prodigal's return."

Joan smiled. "Yes!—He and Feenga are great friends. We shall all miss him when he goes away to be educated."

"I told Boris Evanovich to look after him," the Governor replied, "and if you don't want him back, why doubtless our good Boris will make him into a railroad engineer. Boris is a little mad about railroads, they solve all problems for him."

Another burst of merriment interrupted him, and with a smile he turned again to his hostess. "It is a long time since I saw the inside of a veritable baba's kitchen, Anna Mihaelovna. Would it be permitted . . . as your guest? Just for five little minutes, to smell the oven again!"

Joan laughed. "Please, yes! Feenga will be highly honored! But you'll find a terrible mess. The last time I was inside they were dancing, and I rescued my baby from under the table."

The Governor looked mischievous. "What after all are the affairs of a province compared to a good glass of tea! The province can limp along for a minute or two without an executive!" He led the way on tip-toe like a conspirator.

Outside the door they heard Peter's voice dramatic with excitement. "Thus one became an authentic beggar, Barin, one learned to whine with the best of them, and

I even followed the blue-eyed Stranger through China-town——"

The Governor put his hand firmly on the latch. "Enough of this, madam—he is about to divulge a state secret! Allow me . . ."

Peter, in full flight, saw Joan in the open doorway. "Ah, Barina!—we celebrate!" Then he saw the Governor, and sidled toward Feenga. Womanlike she rose to the occasion, and coming out from behind the table bobbed a curtsey. "We are listening to stories," she said, sweeping Orlof into the scene. "There is still tea and cakes if one is permitted——"

Joan left it to His Excellency to explain his presence in his own way. He bent over the hand of his new hostess. "That will be splendid—just one little glass!" He sat down on the chicken coop close to the oven, and sniffed. "Ach, but it reminds me of my foster mother! Now if there were only a delicious crust of bread—steaming hot—and three lumps of sugar for my tea! So—and who was this storyteller that was making you laugh?"

Peter had recovered his breath. "Boris Evanovich, Barin! He has built a railroad in the Caucasus, and a bridge over the Sungari, and once a mujik knocked him down and dropped him through a hole in the ice."

"Bravo!"—The Governor was enjoying himself—"And now we will hear the story of how he came by that scar on his chin. . . . Come, Boris Evanovich, the ladies wait!"

"It is not such a great story, Excellency," Orlof began, "though at the time it appeared exciting enough. I was two or three years out of the engineering school,

really nothing but a lad, and I was working with a construction gang on a branch line that was being pushed through the foothills of the Caucasus, toward the big copper mines.

"We were having trouble with the hill folk, because in places we had to cut through their vineyards and crops. In one instance a village of twenty or thirty houses got in the way; and in hill country there is little choice, one must follow the grade, so we had orders to move part of that village. It would not have mattered greatly, but there was a monument to some local saint which had to be torn down, and it made the people angry. And when a Caucasian is angry he is very angry indeed.

"They said little at the time, but when we had moved our crew five versts or so up the line the trouble began. At first it was nothing but thieving; then they began to pick off our men. The situation began to look serious because we had established a telegraph station on the site of the old village, and also a depot of supplies.

"It worried me especially, because the telegraph operator was a friend of mine—a man whom I had known well at school—and every night when I got in from work I used to talk to him over the wire to see that he was all right."

His Excellency glanced up from his tea. "So you can use a telegraph instrument, in addition to building railroads?"

Orlof shrugged. "One can, yes, Excellency. One learned it so that one could swear at subordinates who thought more of their comfort than of sending up necessary supplies!"

"Quite so!" agreed the Governor. "So you talked over the wire . . ."

"I talked to him almost every night," Orlof went on, "and if he reported that the hill men were getting ugly I would mention it to the head engineer. But there it was —often the head engineer was busy with his own troubles and nothing was done. Nothing was done except that each week we pushed our railhead a little farther into the hills, and my friend was left more and more isolated.

"One day he told me that his sister was coming to keep house for him. Naturally I told him to try and dissuade her but he only laughed. 'Our wild men are getting tame,' he said, 'they are harvesting their crop of grapes!' And it seemed to be so for when his sister, Ekaterina, arrived they were quite kind to her. In fact, one was laughed at for one's anxiety.

"However, as it turned out the villagers were not tame after all, they were merely waiting their opportunity for revenge, which came one day when a larger supply train than usual, with three cars of dynamite, stopped there for the night.

"As it happened I did not have my usual gossip over the wire that evening, and I was actually going to bed when the operator looked in and told me that the line had gone out of commission half an hour before. 'With that supply train on the siding and the wire going dead that way, one got to thinking,' he said. 'If those villagers are on the rampage there are three cars of dynamite on the track!'

"I pulled on my boots again and went to the chief. He was writing a report and did not want to be disturbed.

'Go to bed,' he said, 'it isn't the first time the wires have gone out, and the dynamite should be under proper guard anyway. However—if you're anxious, take a hand trolley and go and investigate yourself.'

"As a matter of fact I almost decided not to go. It was not so very unusual for the wire to go down, what with temporary construction and trees and what not. But the more I thought of that monument we had moved the more anxious I became, and after an hour or so I took the lightest hand trolley we had and started.

"It was down grade and as I did not want to be laughed at I went alone. That was foolish, of course, because in the event of trouble what could one man do? Also, when I was halfway there it came to me that the conductor would never sit quietly by and allow his train to be looted; the siding was half a verst above the new village we had built, and before such a thing as that happened he would get up steam and escape."

"Unless he was drunk!" Peter suggested.

"Exactly, unless he was drunk—which happened to be the case. But I did not know that until afterward, and so I slid round every curve expecting a head-on collision.

"I left the trolley on the line close to the switch because, just as I reached it, I heard a rifle shot and I thought it best not to blunder too suddenly into the midst of a situation that I did not understand.

"I knew the train would be standing just round the bend, in front of a temporary building where my friend and the other officials were housed, so I crept down the track under cover of the bank until I came to the locomotive. Here I ought to have found an armed sentry be-

cause all supply trains, especially those carrying dynamite, are required to carry a guard. I found the sentry all right, but he was lying beside the cab of the locomotive with his throat cut. At the rear of the train, which was still out of sight round the curve, I could hear sounds of fighting, men shouting, and heavy blows as though wreckers were breaking into freight cars.

"I believe I wasted a precious minute wondering what to do next, whether to rush off in search of my friend or to attempt to save the train. Then it came to me that the train would be a better means of escape than an open trolley driven by hand, and I vaulted into the cab to look at the steam gauge.

"It showed about half pressure and the fire was banked for the night, so I stoked up as quickly as possible ready for emergencies and dropped back onto the track again.

"The noise and shouting had stopped during the few minutes I had been at work, and as I crept along beside the train there was hardly a sound beside my own footsteps. When I came in sight of the office I understood why. They had broken into a car—not a dynamite car but general supplies—and for the moment at least they were occupied in looting the contents.

"By this time I had come far enough to get a view of the rear end of the train. A crowd was collected round the conductor's van. One could see them only too clearly, for they had lighted a fire beneath the van, in which the conductor and crew slept, to smoke them out.

"I almost started to run back to the locomotive then, for I realized that one must act quickly to save the train. But I remembered it would take another ten minutes at

least to get up enough steam, and also I remembered my friend, and his sister, Ekaterina.

"So I dodged across the track under cover of the station building, and looked in at a back window. There was a candle burning inside and I saw that it was the telegraph room, and that they had tied my friend down to his chair, while at the end of the table Ekaterina stood with her hands tied behind her. Fortunately for us all there was only one Caucasian on guard or this story would have ended differently. He was fully armed, rifle and kinjal, but he was watching the progress of the looting from the front window and between him and Ekaterina was the table, with its instruments strewn about all over the floor.

"I hesitated a second at the sight of the armed Caucasian, but scattering shots were coming from the conductor's van and I realized that it was not going to resist the fire forever, so under cover of the noise I opened the door.

"Ekaterina saw me at once but she did not move. She merely looked helplessly at the Caucasian and made signs for me to go away. Then a board creaked and the fellow whipped round. I ducked low and rushed, but those hill men are quicker than cats. He fired before I came to grips, and if Ekaterina had not pushed the table against him and spoiled his aim I would probably have been killed. As it was—well, one carries the scar!"

Here Boris Evanovich stopped and began to roll a cigarette.

Both Peter and Feenga showed signs of protest, but in the presence of so many well-born ones they contrived to sit still. Not so the Governor, however.

He stirred his tea. "One supposes you got promotion for that," he remarked dryly. "But unless you finish the story I shall take steps to reverse the matter forthwith!"

Orlof laughed. "The rest is soon told. Between us we knocked the Caucasian senseless and took his gun. After that, it was no trouble to get back to the locomotive again. Certainly there was a period of suspense while we got a full head of steam; as I remember it now a man or two were killed; but we saved the train, with Ekaterina doing duty at the throttle while my friend and I kept the rioters from getting into the cab."

"And what happened to Ekaterina?" Feenga asked, forgetting in her excitement that she was a mere woman who sat quiet in the presence of men.

Orlof lit his cigarette. "Soon after I left hospital her brother was moved to the Baltic province and I was promoted to the Urals. I have never seen either of them since. That is what happens, little one, if you enter the service of the railroad."

Feenga heaved a long sigh and offered him some more tea.

A few minutes later, when she and Peter were alone, she sighed again. "One wishes he had married her!—But there it is, doubtless she married a fat one with a squint and has twenty sprawling babies by now."

As the cook was not near to stop him, Peter put two lumps of sugar in his mouth. "Idiot! such a man cannot be bothered with women."

Feenga looked him over with disdain while she took off the holiday kerchief he had given her and smoothed out her hair which, since she had lived in Joan's kitchen,

was both clean and well cared for. "Is it permitted to make thy bed, O High-born One, or dust thou sleep with old White-head in the guest room?"

"I have told thee that for all he does not choose to mention it he is the Governor," Peter retorted. "Thou wilt shut thy mouth."

Feenga began a teasing dance, intended to annoy. "I also have a secret thou dost not know! And thou art too proud to ask!"

She danced up to the table, and having shot her bolt began clearing away the remains of their feast.

CHAPTER X

THE WAY OF AN ARISTOCRAT

NEXT day, the Governor and Plotnikof, Nakeetin and old Stenka, with two of the mine police to care for the pack horses, left the Foreigner's house without any formality whatsoever. All were in civilian clothes.

Stephen Wyld and his wife watched them from the end of the porch. The spare upright old man rode beside the head of his Secret Service, with nothing to suggest that he was a person of importance except that he sat Stephen Wyld's best horse like a cavalry officer. At the corner he looked back and waved.

"If Russia had a few thousand more like him in the governing class," Stephen remarked, "between them they might manage to prevent the wholesale revolution that is on its way."

Joan frowned. "Every educated man in Russia talks that way about revolution. If all the best men in the country are so certain it's coming why don't they get together and do something?"

Stephen shook his head. "Ask Orlof, he is a Slav! 'What do *we* know?' as Peter would say; we are nothing but foreigners. The problem is the peasants, a hundred and thirty odd million of them, ignorant of everything but growing food, and pretty ignorant of that. As you know, hunger is the historic mother of revolutions

and half of them are on the edge of starvation most of the time. On top of the heap is the Tsar, a foolish little man, with advisers who tell him pretty much what he wants to believe; and at the bottom are the agitators, unbalanced and frequently unscrupulous people who want to do in a couple of years what honest administrators know will take a couple of generations at least. The mujik's present idea of freedom is to snatch everything in sight, and wise old men like the Governor know that perfectly well. The only remedy is education which in the long run might fit them for self-government, but the crowd at the top blocks all that, and liberal men like His Excellency are shunted off to distant provinces, out of harm's way. No wonder the old boy looks tired about the eyes! He knows what's in front of Russia—and when it comes you and I and the kid had better not be here!"

Joan looked thoughtful. "I give up trying to understand Russians! Last night that dear old man invited himself into the kitchen to drink tea with Feenga and Peter. He sat on the chicken coop and thoroughly enjoyed himself. No pretense about it! And yet he *is* the Governor of the province—and a great aristocrat—I've seen him in his official setting in Chita!"

Stephen laughed. "Listen to this! Yesterday we inspected the men's quarters. He discovered a mujik who was born a serf on his estate, and right there in a room full of people he kissed him on both cheeks. Talk of democracy, we aren't in it with a Russian 'well-born!' And yet touch them officially and they have a ramrod down their backs at once."

"Well, whether it was with or without a ramrod he's

certainly done something to Peter," Joan answered. "The boy would willingly kiss his boots."

"They had a talk when Peter came home. Just exactly what happened we'll never know, but my guess is that it wasn't an interview between a governor and a peasant, but an intimate talk between a patriarch and one of his children. As I said just now we're only foreigners, and can't understand how one and the same man can be high official, and patriarch, and brother all in one without getting things mixed. But they seem to do it quite easily.

"Another thing, don't imagine His Excellency came here just to be polite to us. He came to meet Orlof secretly, on some important affair of state, and he was in the middle of a conference when Peter broke in. The boy ought to have had his head chopped off. Instead of which he came out of that room with loyalty to the Governor established forever, and his life-long feud against officials pretty well punctured besides. Disentangle that if you can!—Meantime I'm going to look at the kid, I haven't seen him for three days."

Joan tucked her hand into his arm. "The young gentleman was last seen going for a walk with Boris Evanovich. By the way, why didn't Boris go with the rest of them? He tells me he goes to-morrow."

"Not so mysterious," Stephen answered. "Orlof is a railroad man, and if he traveled with the Governor the cat would be out of the bag. Give them a chance to play the game their own way!"

"Well, I'm glad you don't govern a province," Joan decided. "It would be too absorbing altogether!"

Two other people had watched His Excellency depart. Feenga had watched him from the top of her own particular knoll where she had gone to look for her book which, during the excitement of Peter's arrival, she had left in the grass. And Peter had watched him from a little distance behind her. He was following Feenga in order to talk privately to her before he went away.

When he came close, she was sitting in the grass with the open lesson book on her knee. The moment she caught sight of him she hid it under her apron, but it was just too late.

He stared at her in complete amazement. "What art thou doing with that?"

She blushed a most uncomfortable red. "Go back to thy Boris Evanovich and leave me alone."

Peter dropped down beside her; there was a short struggle, and he sat back on his heels with the book in his hands. He examined it carefully.

"Gospodi!—*thou?* . . ."

"Gospodi!—*me!* . . ." Feenga mimicked. "And why not?"

Peter was suddenly shy. "A great thing such as this, and thou hast kept it a secret this long while!"

Feenga blew up. "*Secret!* Thou pig! thou art bursting with secrets—which are not secrets at all! That old man, thy governor . . . and thy Boris Evanovich . . . and the book which he lost . . . Byedda!"

At the mention of the notebook Peter showed signs of discomfort. "A girl such as thee—what dost thou know?"

As a matter of fact Feenga did not know, but she had

overheard fragments of talk. "Well——" she said, with tantalizing slowness. "Well, one has ears!"

Peter continued to look unhappy, while she watched him out of the corner of her eye. His discomfort made her feel better and her manner underwent a change to breezy indifference. "As one did not desire to remain always among the pigs one spoke of it to thy darling Djon. Thus it is that in a little while one will be able to read, and it should not be a great matter to find service with a high-born one. In such a place a girl will learn manners, which is something a hishnik could never learn."

Peter made a noise indicating disgust. She replied by putting her tongue out. It was a declaration of war and ordinarily the boy would have pommeled her into submission. But instead he continued to look curiously at this new Feenga, who did such disturbing things to her hair, and presently without the least intending to do so he blurted out the thing that was at the bottom of his heart. "One will be lonely in Chita without thee!"

Then it was that Feenga made a mistake. She looked at him again—and her defenses went down with a rush. "Ah, Petroushka, if thou art lonely it will be thine own fault for Boris Evanovich has promised to find me a place to serve, in Chita."

Just too late she remembered she was parting with her one cherished secret—the secret which was a protest against Peter's refusal to share the exciting details of his long quest. "Byedda! I was a little fool to tell thee!" she said dolefully. "But there it is, one speaks from the heart."

Peter gambolled like a young puppy, to relieve his feel-

ings. "Gospodi! One would tell thee many things, but Boris Evanovich forbids. It is the way with those who wear uniforms! Even so, I will tell thee a thing I discovered for myself, therefore none can say that I have broken my trust. A Chinese peddler followed us into the taiga. He dropped something which I found." From his pocket he produced Ne Ah Bo's joss stick. "Dost thou see that?"

Feenga nodded and shrank away. "It is pogani——" she whispered. "It is a heathen icon! In Gorbitza it is said they will kill thee for stealing such a thing from their joss houses. If thou art wise thou wilt throw it away."

Peter did nothing of the sort. He continued to roll it over and over in his palm. "When I found it I, also, supposed it was an icon but now I know it to be a mark of authority, just as the crossed horns on Boris Evanovich's cap give him power in the service of the railroad. Ne Ah Bo, the peddler, dropped it in the mud and I picked it up and carried it with me to Blagovestchensk. For a time I forgot it, until one saw that the same sign had been written in the notebook, after it had been stolen. Then I remembered the high-born Asiat! Boris Evanovich has talked of him, so it is not a secret. I followed the Asiat through Chinatown, and by listening discovered that his name is Tsing Feng, and it has come to me that he is an enemy of Russia. He is a great one with long nails, who sends men into the taiga to spy. Tf-oo-ee!

"Twice I went to Boris Evanovich to give him the stick, but each time it came to me out of the air that one should say nothing."

Feenga still looked frightened. "They will kill thee if they find it!"

"They would kill Boris Evanovich," Peter answered, "but who would think to look for such a thing in the pocket of a boy? Not even an Asiat with long nails."

"Throw it away!" Feenga insisted.

Peter looked rather inclined to do so. Then his head went up. "Who can say that even two such mujiks as we are may not one day repay Boris Evanovich for giving us his trust? He has an enemy, so much is plain—therefore I will not throw it away."

He examined the Chinese character on the joss stick. "Dost thou think thou wilt remember it?"

Feenga shook her head. "Asiat writing is not according to God."

"Even so I will write it in thy book," Peter asserted. He found a place haphazard on page fifteen and made a fair copy of the Chinese character. "That is Tsing Feng's mark," he told her, "and that old Asiat visited the Governor in Blagovestchensk. There now! I have told thee a secret which is known only to my saint and Boris Evanovich."

Feenga's eyes shone with a great devotion, and she hugged her spelling book as though it had suddenly become a precious thing.

Two days later she hugged it still more closely while she watched Peter and Orlof ride away; and then, being nothing but a girl, she kissed the Foreigner's baby and went back to her work.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE THRESHOLD

WHEN Orlof reached Chita he wasted no time. He found a place where Peter could live and on the second day after their arrival he took him to the only school of which Chita could boast.

It was a government school, designed as were most schools in Russia to educate the sons of priests and officials to be good Chenovniks. Merchants with liberal views avoided such, and sent their sons to larger cities where teachers could be found who would educate them on better lines. The fortunate ones were sent to the Baltic provinces, or even to Germany.

That Orlof was able to get the son of a hishnik enrolled meant that His Excellency had issued commands.

But Peter knew none of these things. To him any school was the most wonderful place in the world, and the thought that he was going to one made him want to light a candle to his saint.

When the actual day arrived he rose at daylight and put on his holiday clothes. He had been too excited to think much about Feenga, but he did remember her now because she had made him his shirt. He brushed his hair before a mirror, which was an unheard-of proceeding for him, and thereafter he sat on the fence waiting for his Barin to appear.

It seemed curious that Orlof was not excited at all. He went in leisurely fashion to the club, and there he kept Peter waiting an hour. From there he went to the Administration Building and talked to a clerk; it was nearly noon before he was ready to go on to the school.

When at last they arrived Peter discovered that it was an unimpressive building of logs, without even a shield over the doorway to distinguish it from a hundred others of its kind. He had expected something at least as imposing as a church.

Before he reached the office of the principal he was already downhearted. Here, a stern old man asked him his age, which was uncertain, and then he made him read aloud out of a book, which was far more difficult than reading to himself in the kitchen at home. Next, he asked him two questions in geography which he could not answer, and finally he turned him into the corridor while he talked to Orlof alone. Peter felt very blue. Plainly he was nothing but a mujik after all.

The corridor filled up with boys tumbling over each other to reach the street. Some were younger than Peter but most of them were almost men. None of them seemed in the least friendly when they saw his peasant bearing and clothes; one big fellow came close and sniffed, as though suggesting that he needed a bath. By the time Orlof joined him the boy was feeling both angry and ashamed.

"Well, Petroushka—here thou wilt spend thy days for a couple of years! Are the sons of the high-born ones to thy taste?"

Peter swallowed a lump in his throat. "One is not

afraid to fight," he said grimly. "But, Barin, they wear a uniform! One had not thought of such a thing."

Orlof looked at him a moment and led the way out.

Perhaps it was not by chance that he turned toward the open parade ground in front of the Governor's residence. When they came in sight of the great pile of buildings with the flag flying in the open square, he stopped.

"What was it that I said to thee out in the taiga, Petroushka? . . . 'Of all things, the peasant needs education.' . . . It is because of this that His Excellency has made it possible for thee to go to school."

"But to wear a uniform like a Chenovnik, Barin! . . ."

"To wear a uniform or not to wear a uniform is, in itself, a small matter. It is the heart that matters, not the jacket that covers it up."

Perhaps he would have said more, but a file of mounted Cossacks turned into the square with the Governor driving in their midst. Orlof saluted as they swept by. When they had gone he turned to Peter again. "If His Excellency is willing to wear a uniform is it too great a sacrifice for thee?"

Peter gulped. "He is a true man, Barin, and so art thou. Because of it I will do this thing. But, Barin, to wear it will be to leave the taiga behind."

Orlof nodded. "It is the price of thy new service. But there is still time to turn back."

"No, Barin . . . one understands that it was already too late when the Foreigner taught one to read."

"Come, then! we will buy it and thou shalt put it on."

He took him to a store bigger than any he had seen, and had him properly fitted out. Tailored trousers of

dark gray cloth, a tunic to match, with a military collar and a black leather belt. A cap with a peak. Knee boots fine enough for a holiday.

When, finally, Peter surveyed himself in a full-length mirror he was rather pleased. Except for the cap it was not so terribly official. The cap, one could see at a glance, was a Chenovnik's headpiece even to the shield on the visor; such a thing could not be carried comfortably in the belt like a sheepskin cap; but doubtless it was expensive and must not be thrown away.

Expensive? . . . Peter turned to Orlof. "Is there enough money, Barin, to pay for such clothes?"

Orlof smiled. "It is a gift from the Governor; and ten roubles for books. Come, let us buy thy satchel! The money that I have still to give thee for thy service in the taiga will pay for food for a while, and later we will find a way for thee to earn more."

While they waited for their parcel Boris Evanovich leaned with unseeing eyes against the counter. The boy's difficulty over his uniform had made him restless. To be an official when all Russia was seething with discontent was a thankless job. The railroad claimed his loyalty, certainly, nonetheless he was acquainted with many revolutionaries who at least claimed his respect, and that in spite of the fact that if they should succeed they would destroy a large part of that which he had given his life to build.

The affairs of the railroad were too vast and too complicated to be tinkered at by men without discipline—and yet he would almost certainly see it attempted during his

lifetime. One more unsuccessful war would bring the whole top-heavy structure down with a crash, for the men who surrounded the Tsar were afraid to grapple with a situation which all men knew was rotten to the core.

He found a cigarette and hunted for a match while his mind wandered to the extension of the railroad—shifted to Peter and his new uniform—and from Peter to Tsing Feng, who of a certainty would not be afraid to grapple with any situation that would bring Russia to her knees. . . . Ah, the boy had gathered up his bundle and was ready to leave.

"All right, Petroushka!—now march! for I have other things to do." He dismissed him, and prepared to follow at a more leisurely pace.

When he reached the entrance, a woman stopped suddenly to stare at him, blocking his exit. His glance at first was casual; he merely waited for her to move. But she did not stir. Instead she smiled, a little doubtfully, then moved closer and addressed him.

"Boris Evanovich? . . ."

He straightened up and, automatically, his hand went to his cap, but obviously he was puzzled. Then recognition came.

"Not Ekaterina, after all these years? . . ."

She laughed with excitement and offered him both her hands. "Of course it's Ekaterina; and you are Boris! How could one not recognize you? Take me somewhere where we can talk, at once!"

For still a moment Orlof studied her face, then he led her out into the street.

Peter, who had loitered to examine his reflection in the window, saw the two pass behind him. They were so close that he heard Orlof say: "Sixteen years, Ekaterina!"—and her answer: "Half my lifetime, Boris!"—and then they were out of earshot. He looked after them with frank curiosity.

By common consent they turned toward the parade ground. "What brought you to Chita?" he asked.

"Housekeeping!" she replied. "My brother is still in the telegraph service. We have been here three months; perhaps we will stay a long time."

"I got back two days ago," he told her, "after being in the taiga all the summer."

She looked at him thoughtfully as though considering her next remark. "We heard that—and we heard you were coming back. I was on the lookout."

"You heard I was coming back? But I didn't tell anybody!" They both laughed. "But of course in the telegraph one does hear things."

"Yes, one does hear things," she said quietly.

He looked a question, as though her words were somehow significant. At that moment a group of officers passed and they both fell silent. When they were alone again he asked a question. "Why did you never write?"

For quite half a minute she did not answer. She seemed to be absorbed in looking at the flag which had just come into view in the center of the square. He studied her face again. She had been a mere girl sixteen years ago, now she was a woman, with experience in her eyes. They were friendly eyes but they had learned reserve. Orlof reflected grimly that such reserve was common since the

war. He sighed, and she turned quickly. "It is sometimes wiser not to write. There was your career!"

"My career?" he spoke almost impatiently.

"Yes, your career." She put her hand on his sleeve. "After what you did for us both!"

Orlof tucked her hand under his arm. "Because of that, may we not trust each other?—I shall not make a secret report to the Governor, even though he happens to be my very good friend."

She said nothing and after a moment's pause he went on. "Twice during the war a list of the active revolutionaries came into my hands. I destroyed them both." Her fingers moved slightly. "Your brother's name was on both lists—yours was not. But do not mistake me, my loyalty is to my service, which means discipline, not revolution."

"And my loyalty is to my brother," she answered quietly with her eyes on his face.

"Is that why you never married?" he asked.

She smiled. "Who shall say?—Possibly one did not want to marry a revolutionary."

When presently they turned back toward the town they were so entirely absorbed in each other that they brushed by Peter a second time without seeing him.

*"*Vot tebia na!*" he exploded, with impish glee.

*What do you know about that!

PART III

CHAPTER I

EDUCATION

PETER'S first month at school was not a success.

From the moment when the Foreigner had undertaken to teach him to read he had pictured a school as a truly remarkable place, something honored and apart, almost in the nature of a church. One hushed one's voice slightly when one spoke of it for it was understood that education was only for the well-born; and now, by the intervention of his saint, he was to be educated himself—perhaps he was even to become a well-born himself!

It had come to him "out of the air" that once he put on a uniform and walked into the school he would leave the taiga behind forever; and he loved the taiga with a love that sprang from the deepest places in his soul; neither had he any wish to become a well-born.

Even though the building itself had turned out to be of logs, and no larger or more dignified than a barn, and though in that first month his respect for well-borns had received an irretrievable blow, he still wished to remain at school. But his illusions were shattered.

True, the scholars knew more than he did. They read and recited in a way that filled him with envy, and the very titles of their books proclaimed his ignorance.

Physics—Geometry—such names meant nothing at all, even Geography and History had to be explained. Mathematics, he discovered, meant adding and subtracting figures and he was good at that; but here were boys of eleven and twelve, mere babies compared to him, who giggled behind his back, while the older ones, too, made fun of his ignorance and were openly contemptuous of his peasant origin. All of them were sons of lesser officials and better-class tradesmen. They resented his presence among them and to make it plain that he was nothing but an interloper they called him "The Mujik."

In Russian the word denotes a class and is used interchangeably with "peasant," but on the tongue of a well-born it easily becomes an insult meaning an uncouth fellow.

The scholars used the word with a shrug and a jerk of the head that made Peter furious. But the patience of the taiga was in him and he bided his time.

One day he stopped behind after his class was dismissed. History fascinated him, and that morning he had learned a number of interesting facts about the Tartar invasion and the part that his ancestors, the Cossacks, had played in that heroic struggle.

The principal of the school had noted this boy from downriver and had talked to him understandingly about Russia, about people, about the world—such talk as made Peter's clothes feel tight. Significantly he had echoed the very words of Boris Evanovich. "The peasants must be educated if Russia is ever to be strong, and you are a peasant—in a manner of speaking the first-fruits of the day that is coming. In a few years, one hopes, you will go

back in humbleness of spirit to teach those who have been less fortunate than you."

The conversation had lasted all of half an hour and Peter had walked out of the building with his head in the clouds. If only he could justify the old man's hopes of him . . .

The school was situated in the road that led to the parade ground, and from the door one could see the flag on the high staff, and the official residence among the surrounding hills. Peter took off his cap.

Perhaps for the first time in his life the flag of his country stirred him to a national sense wider than the taiga of his birth. His instinct was to cross himself and register a vow, but an interruption came in the form of a stinging blow on the ear. Somebody had thrown a potato and it nearly knocked him down.

He swung round to face a dozen boys grouped at the end of the building. Most of them were ready to flee but three or four of the older ones stood waiting. One youth especially watched with easy bravado, obviously it was he who had thrown the potato.

"Well, Mujik!" he said, "has the old man in there been teaching thee thy alphabet?"

Peter looked him coldly in the eye. "Mind thine own business, thou lousy Chenovnik!"

His assailant, Victor Godinof by name, was the son of an army officer, a handsome boy with silky manners and the heart of a bully. He was old enough to be growing a beard, and had been a source of offense to Peter for a month, mostly because he held his nose with delicate fingers whenever Peter passed him.

"Come here, stinker, I would speak to thee!" he commanded now.

Peter blazed inwardly, but with wooden face he crossed the space between them. "What is thy pleasure?" he asked almost humbly.

"To spit in thy face, Mujik," Godinof answered. "It will teach thee not to curry favor out of school hours."

Peter laid his books down against the corner of the building. "Finish thy talk quickly, Chenovnik, for I am about to deal with thee as a mujik has been taught to handle a pig."

Godinof did not wait to be attacked. He was older and heavier than Peter and had a longer reach, and he aimed a blow at him which, had it caught Peter squarely, would have knocked him down. But Peter had learned to dodge such things from childhood. He dodged now and landed on Godinof's ear, jumped backward smartly and came in again with another blow, which tapped his nose.

"That for thee, Chenovnik!" he exulted, as another swing missed him by a hair.

But Godinof came on again. Not carelessly now but with determination, for he was far from being a coward. Peter plunged in a third time and got knocked down. Godinof dusted his hands.

"One must teach a mujik manners!" he remarked to his supporters, and to give the idea emphasis he kicked Peter's books out into the street.

Still on the ground Peter made a remark not suitable for print. Then his limbs gathered under him like a little animal and he sprang from a crouching position straight

for his antagonist's throat. He took a blow on the mouth which jarred his head backward, but nothing could stop his momentum and they went down together like two wrestlers on a mat.

The force of Peter's onslaught broke his hold, but he was up and on top of his enemy before Godinof could twist himself clear, and all the strength of the taiga and his lifelong grudge against officials were in his arm. Godinof hadn't a chance.

As soon as this became apparent three other boys undertook to interfere, but a fourth who had been standing quietly on the outskirts stepped into the ring. "Fair play," he said, "or one of you will fight me."

The next attempt at interference was from an officer in cavalry uniform who pushed into the crowd.

Perhaps it was as well that he arrived for Godinof had had enough. The officer stood them both on their feet and looked them over. He recognized Godinof at once.

"Humph, Victor! fighting again?"

Victor dusted his clothes. "What business have such common ones in school? One does not like mujiks at too close quarters," he grumbled.

The cavalry officer turned his attention exclusively to Peter. "Art thou a peasant?"

Peter's blood was up, therefore he did not show the proper humility in the presence of a military officer. "What of it, Barin? My father was also a Cossack, even as thine."

The officer lost his temper. "Answer civilly or thou wilt feel my whip."

Peter shrugged. "Not for the first time, Barin!"

"Neither will it be the last," he was told dryly. "Now, answer me, why dost thou fight?"

Someone in the crowd supplied the information. "It is not permitted to call him a mujik now that he has learned to read."

The officer made a contemptuous noise. "Education spoils a good peasant! However, it can be rectified! Down on thy knees and ask forgiveness."

Peter wiped a trickle of blood from his mouth. The officer touched him on the shoulder with his whip. "Kneel! It is an order."

Peter did not kneel. "Begin thy beating," he said.

The whip struck him. "Kneel! . . ."

Peter stood still.

He took his beating stoically while the crowd of boys looked on. When it was over he picked up his cap, dusted it, and put it on his head. In the presence of an officer he should have held it in his hand. Everybody present knew it.

"Is that all, Well-born?"

The officer adjusted his belt. "It will do for the present," he said. "When we get thee in the army thou wilt learn discipline. Meantime——" He beckoned to Godinof and turned away.

When they were out of sight Peter looked about him. "Seeing that we are undisturbed, if there is any left who would fight with a mujik——"

But no one offered. The boys stood awkwardly silent, waiting a decent chance to slip away, but the one who had insisted on fair play picked up the scattered books

and brought them to Peter. "Come, Tovarish," he said casually, "in the kitchen where one lives there is tea waiting. Shall we go together?"

It was the beginning of a friendship which lasted for years. Peter, the mujik, and Gregory Danilof, the son of an official in the post and telegraph service, passed their school days together, and Gregory Danilof taught the boy from the taiga a great many things that it was well for him to know. He began over their first glass of tea.

"That officer who beat thee is a captain in the Governor's bodyguard, and like the rest of them when he speaks to a mujik it is with the voice of God! Forget the puffed-up fool, and tell me by what miracle thou art at school."

But Peter's heart was still too hot. "One does not choose to forget a beating such as that."

Danilof looked him over with renewed interest. "So thou hast a long memory! Then do not forget, but do as I do, hate them and take service under them and so learn more of their ways. Look you, I have a place as waiter in the officers' club, four hours every evening at supper time. It is instructive; they pay me for listening to their quarreling. With the money I can continue at school."

Peter looked doubtful. "A mujik to find service in the club?"

His new friend laughed. "And why not? Forget that thou art a mujik—thou art a scholar—and with a little patience we can get thee employment in more places than one. But the officers' club pays best; if the swine do grunt a good deal they also throw their money about. One gets tips."

Apparently Gregory Danilof could pull strings, for in less than a week Peter found himself at work from five to eight every morning in the club, cleaning up night litter and, as he quickly discovered, helping belated gamblers into their overcoats and showing them carefully into the streets. Army officers, so his new friend told him, had little to do but wear their uniforms correctly and spend their leisure at cards. Certainly many of them seemed to play all night, for many a morning when he reported for work the night steward turned him into a waiter, and made him serve food and drink to belated revelers. As he moved about, quietly collecting cigarette butts and cleaning up the rooms, he heard more than one state secret discussed. Also he remembered what he heard. Like other men, army officers, it appeared, were discontented. They were jealous of their superiors and impatient with their subordinates, and they grumbled at the stupidity of their men. Also, they quarreled constantly among themselves.

But on one point they were all agreed—the growth of the revolutionary party. If one could believe gossip at 5 A. M., revolutionaries filled every back alley in the land. Students, petty officials, shopkeepers, the railroad and telegraph employees, postoffice clerks, all were affected—only the army was free of the pests. Or was the army free? What, as a matter of fact, did anyone know? Meanwhile, the Governor up there in his mansion was thought to be a liberal at heart. . . . "Here, boy, these cards are sticky, fetch a new pack—scurry!"

And Peter, pocketing his tip and watching the flushed faces, would go back to his sweeping, thinking hot

thoughts about well-born Chenovniks until it was time for him to slip away to school.

In November he heard a rumor which sent him hot-foot to Boris Evanovich, of whom he had not heard for a month; Orlof, he had discovered, was not popular at the club. He found him dressing to go out. "Barin," he began at once, "it is said that the railroad is to be extended to Blagovestchensk. Can such a thing be true?"

Orlof went on with his dressing. "Do they teach thee such things at school?"

"No, Barin, one hears what is said at the club."

"At the club!"—Orlof grunted. "Attend to thy sweeping, Petroushka."

But Peter was not so easily put off. "There is the map, Barin!—One cannot help thinking of such a thing. One understands also that thou art in the railroad service. The railroad will change the taiga, Barin—one thinks of that also."

Orlof looked at him with sympathy. "If the rumor is true, of a certainty many things will be changed. Where thou hast known only rabbits and gold thieves, there will be villages and roads. Even a city like Chita will change. It will grow into double its size for, as I told you once before on a mountain top, the railroad brings people and people bring progress. It is necessary that such things be."

Peter sighed. "Then it is true, Barin?"

Orlof put on his cap. "Who shall say, Petroushka? Rumors are rumors, and in my service one learns to hold one's tongue."

Peter accepted his last remark as proof. "One's heart is heavy, the taiga will never be the taiga again."

Orlof put a hand on his shoulder. "There will be plenty left to last thy lifetime! And now come with me."

They crossed the city together, passed the officers' club, and went on toward the suburb where most of the smaller railroad officials lived with their families. It was handy to the Administration Building and overlooked the valley beyond the yards.

The houses in this part of town were built in the village manner, each house standing in its own yard with a detached kitchen and shed. Practically all were surrounded by high board fences, and had gates which were locked at night. For Chita was still very much a frontier town with a population which fluctuated with the changing politics of the East. Before the advent of the railroad and up to the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War it had been an overgrown village, given over entirely to the administrative affairs of the province, but with the coming of war it had boomed like a Western city.

After peace was declared and the army began its slow trek back to Russia the town had been swamped with deserters and revolutionaries, and during the famine and the troublous times of 1906 there were weeks on end when the garrison fought in the streets with the undisciplined forces of disorder and discontent. It was then that His Excellency showed his mettle, for contrary to the usual strong-arm methods he ordered the garrison into barracks and called a meeting to discuss the situation peaceably, guaranteeing immunity to all who attended. He presided himself, with no one but old Stenka

behind his chair, and after listening for a week to a flood of oratory and abuse he browbeat them into attention, explaining patiently to the striking railroad and post-office hands that, whatever their grievances, nothing could be done until they went back to work; and he advised the rest of them to go home and plant their crops. And through it all he steadfastly refused to promise what he could not carry out.

In the end he prevailed, though he made enemies in both camps. The army resented his success, and the revolutionaries doubted his sincerity and mysteriously dropped out of sight to await another chance. The Governor, with no illusions, went back to his long room and the portrait of the Tsar, and wrote caustically worded reports to Petersburg, advocating lower taxes and more schools "before it is too late."

After that, as usual, things drifted.

And now two years later, Peter, trudging through the snow beside Boris Evanovich and noting the bullet marks on the fences, threw out a question. "Barin, where wert thou at the time of the big trouble after the war?"

"In the railroad sheds," Orlof answered. "One desired to protect the locomotives from being destroyed. In those days bullets were plentiful—one had to be careful at street corners." He looked about him reminiscently. "This part of Chita was built up in the years immediately before the war. It was here that most of the strike leaders lived. They would form their processions down there on the open space which is now becoming Chinatown; and they marched up this street to attack the Administration Building, singing their revolutionary

hymn. Dost thou know the revolutionary hymn, Peter?"

Peter's friend, Gregory Danilof, often hummed the Russian *Marseillaise* and Peter had learned it from him. They had hummed it together that very afternoon as they walked away from school and the tune was still running in his head, but for some reason he kept the matter to himself.

"But the army, Barin, did they permit these things?"

"Permit!"—Orlof shrugged. "Certainly they did not permit them, but no matter how often the processions were broken up the leaders managed to escape. They always do manage to escape," he added to himself; and walked on in silence until they came to a gate. "We go in here," he remarked, "wait for me in the kitchen, I will not be long."

Peter loitered. A strange kitchen and possibly a chattering old Baba had no particular attraction for him; but it was cold standing about in the yard and the prospect of hot tea overcame his reluctance. He knocked at the door and went in.

The Baba was stooping down in front of the oven and the kitchen was fragrant with the smell of baking bread. As was customary Peter stood politely on the mat waiting to be invited to sit down. But of a certainty this was no toothless old Baba, it was a young girl! Young girls in Chita made Peter feel shy with their citified ways, even while they excited him, and he looked at this one with expectation. If only she would turn round.

Presently she did so and his heart missed a beat.

"Feenga!"

Feenga dropped a loaf of bread on the floor; after

which she did not exactly run to meet him, she flew! Yet, even so, she stopped short in front of him. "Peter! Bad one! Have I not waited a whole week for thee to come? One is bursting with news!"

Peter seized her by the arm. "Thee, Feenga!—Little one, they did not tell me thou wert in Chita. One has asked Boris Evanovich, and he has said nothing. It was a trick to take me by surprise." His feet began to dance.

Feenga broke away and hands on hips surveyed him critically from head to foot. "Byedda!—hast thou turned Chenovnik with thy new clothes?"

Peter straightened his student's tunic almost impatiently. "Idiot!—Such things make for nothing at all in one's heart. One sweeps floors when one is not in school."

For answer she dropped him a mock curtsey. Her hand went languidly to her hair which no longer hung down her back. "But for thy nose, my Petroushka, one would be tempted to kiss thee!"

"It is all one," he retorted. And because, suddenly, there seemed nothing to say, he kissed her twice.

Feenga broke away and made a dart for the oven. "Gospodi! the bread!"

And Peter finding his hands empty rescued the loaf which had fallen to the floor, and tearing off a loose piece of crust, began to munch. "For whom dost thou work?" he asked casually.

Feenga's voice lowered significantly. "For who else but Ekaterina—the one for whom thy Boris Evanovich received the scar on his chin!" She carried a loaf of bread to the table and set it down. "Our Boris has come three times already! Three times in a week."

Peter looked superior. "One saw them together when they first met after sixteen years. It was plain for a baby to see."

Feenga bubbled with excitement and whipped another loaf from the oven. "She lives with her brother, Nicholai. That Nicholai Denikin is a queer one for thee! Half the night he is visited by strange ones who come and go by the alley. One hears them crossing the yard and dropping over the fence when one is in bed." She looked at Peter nervously. "In Chita, do they have vodka sellers who are afraid of the police that they go only at night?"

Peter hesitated. The constant talk at the club had given him food for a great deal of thought. In the taiga it was hishniks who troubled the officials—in Chita, it seemed, they called such unruly ones by a different name. Probably it was all one in the end.

Nonetheless it seemed wisest not to talk overmuch about such things, even to Feenga.

"It is none of thy business who goes by in the yard," he said casually. And then he began to tell her about his school.

CHAPTER II

ON WHICH SIDE?

FOR a week rumors of the projected railroad persisted, and then it was officially announced: "Extension of the trans-Siberian railroad to Khabarovsk! . . . Construction to begin in the spring! . . ."

The town shook itself and began to ask questions. Business men looked at each other and smiled. At the club, officers paused in their shuffling of the cards to discuss politics in the East. At school, the principal drew a large-scale map of the taiga—which Peter itched to correct. Up in the Governor's residence, His Excellency walked the floor; while down in the Administration Building, Boris Evanovich, with a few picked men, began working far into the night.

And under cover of darkness, clerks from the post and telegraph services, employees on the railroad, recruits in the army—all sorts and conditions of discontented men —traversed back alleys to secret meetings, where sedition was discussed. And Feenga, sitting up late to make herself new clothes with which to dazzle Peter, listened to strange footsteps crossing the yard outside her window and wondered what they might mean.

And then, as quickly, the excitement died down and uninformed people began to shrug their shoulders. Offi-

cial announcements were so frequently followed by delays, and more delays. . . .

But those who were informed were conscious of an undercurrent of activity which steadily increased as the spring advanced. Forceful men began dropping quietly into Chita to obtain interviews with the Governor. They sought his influence to secure profitable contracts for construction on the new road. He received them in conference, under the portrait of the Tsar, estimated shrewdly the loot they proposed to collect, and referred them to Orlof, his chief of staff.

And Boris Evanovich spread out his plans and watched developments with a shrug. In Russia nothing could be accomplished without corruption—he had known that all his life. Certain exalted ones in Petersburg would of a certainty keep such profitable matters under their own hands. Meanwhile, for himself, his ambition was in sight.

During the winter the officers' club almost forgot his existence, and Peter, in common with more important personages, learned not to interrupt him at his work. He wished to talk to him now, but felt it wisest to seek the aid of Feenga; for with all his preoccupation Boris Evanovich still found time to visit Ekaterina in her brother's house.

But Feenga, also, had ideas concerning interruptions which she expressed freely in her own way. "Sit where thou art, Booby, and talk to me. Those two are alone together and thy Boris is looking into his Ekaterina's eyes. It is a pleasant enough pastime and we will leave them undisturbed."

Peter rumpled his hair. "Even so I would talk to him, Feenga, and thou must help me. . . ."

Instead, she put her elbows on the table ready for a comfortable chat. "He does not wish to be interrupted, Petroushka, so much is evident to a babe. As I have already said he thinks only of his Ekaterina's eyes—her eyes are darker than thine, my little one!"

"It is the railroad of which he thinks most," Peter retorted.

"Nicholai says the railroad is a bad thing," Feenga commented.

"What does a telegraph clerk know?" Peter asked.

"More than thee!" Feenga retorted briskly. "He says it will cost three hundred million roubles in taxes, which is a great sum for peasants to pay. How much is three hundred million roubles, Peter? I asked Ekaterina and she did not know."

Peter looked profound. "If one told thee thou wouldst not understand; and if thou wilt not inform Boris Evanovich that I am waiting I shall go home."

Feenga resisted an inclination to put out her tongue. She wished Peter to stay and took the surest means to keep him, she produced Ekaterina's best atlas and laid it invitingly on the table before him.

Peter could never resist a map, and without troubling the index he opened it at the great waterway.

An hour later, Orlof found them poring over it with their heads together. Being no more able to resist a map than Peter, he sat down beside them and began to talk of the project nearest his heart.

"We turn off into the hills at Nerchinsk, on the old

Siberian line." His pencil dotted a sinuous line across Ekaterina's best map. "So!—through the low pass here, down the north fork of White River—a bridge at this point; and a short tunnel immediately beyond at the bluff where we shot the bear—dost thou remember, Peter?—the bear with the ragged ear! Then, straight sailing past Grassy Mountain into the swamps of the Amazar. . . ." The pencil crossed the Divide and zigzagged through the country of the small rivers, and down the Zeya to Blagovestchensk.

Peter sighed. It had taken them most of the summer merely to traverse that dotted line. "Barin, thou wilt be an old man before it is done!"

Orlof laughed. "Give me plenty of money and labor, Peter, and we can build it in four years."

He sat silent a moment dreaming, while Feenga, with her chin tucked tightly into her two fists, waited until he should glance up. "Barin, one has looked into tunnels on the Foreigner's mine—" she spread her arms to indicate the size—"but one big enough to admit a train! . . . such a thing is not to be believed!"

Orlof laughed at her amazement. "There are forty tunnels round Lake Baikal, little one; by comparison our new tunnel at Bear Rocks will be nothing at all. Perhaps, if thou wilt remind me a year from to-day, I will take thee for a ride on the new track and thou shalt see it for thyself."

Feenga's eyes smoldered. "Is it a promise, Barin?"

Orlof patted her hand and rose to go. "Not a promise, Feenga, but one can always hope!"

He left her then and took Peter with him; but an hour

afterward when Ekaterina went into the kitchen she found her still dreaming over the map. Ekaterina noted the dotted line.

"Thinking of the new road, Feenga?" she asked.

Feenga sighed deeply. "Would it not be a great thing, Barina, to marry a railroad engineer!"

She glanced up almost mischievously but Ekaterina was closing the atlas. "It is time to get supper!" was all the comment she made.

On the way to Orlof's lodgings Peter referred to the subject that was uppermost in his mind. "Barin, one hears thou art about to leave Chita."

"In three days, Petroushka."

"When the school is closed for the summer may I come to thee?"

Orlof considered before he answered. "By Peter's Day there will be five thousand men at work on the new road —one will be too busy to think of thee. However, I will speak to the station master and he shall put thee to work so that thou canst earn money for next year's school."

Five thousand men!—Peter's imagination attempted, vainly, to grapple with the immensity of the thing. "Then it is true, Barin, that the railroad will cost three hundred millions? Who can pay such a sum?"

Orlof did not answer. Since the railroad had been authorized the whole world, seemingly, grumbled of taxes. Gossiping at the club, one asked another if the peasants would pay . . . Ekaterina's brother, Nicholai, spoke darkly of a day that would come . . . even babies like Peter and Feenga were caught up in the current of

unrest. Well!—he had other and more insistent things to occupy his mind just now.

He was on his way to a conference with the Governor, for orders had come from Petersburg that all railroad contractors be permitted to employ Chinese labor to cut down expenses. And meanwhile, the station master reported that already thousands of hungry peasants, more thousands than could be used even without the importation of Chinese labor, were streaming into the province looking for work. This order from Petersburg was serious; and Orlof understood, none better, that bribery was responsible—bribery which originated probably with Tsing Feng.

At the Administration Building Peter took his leave and went in search of Gregory Danilof, who like many another student belonged to an active revolutionary club. Gregory spent much of his spare time reading forbidden literature and quoting other revolutionaries on this matter of taxes and underpaid Chinese labor; for the post and telegraph services were honeycombed with disloyalty, and state secrets intended only for His Excellency's mail bag often circulated freely among those trusted ones who could give the required sign.

Peter was intelligent enough to suspect something of all this; the revolutionary party was a household word even in the taiga, and all peasants looked to it and waited for the day when freedom would come. But of details Peter at present knew nothing beyond such hints as were dropped by Danilof from time to time, and he was too much absorbed in his personal affairs to think much about these. By the time he had worked three hours at the club,

and finished his studies, besides teaching Feenga several evenings a week, he was tired enough to want to sleep.

When he did not find Danilof at once he went home.

Next morning, as usual, he reached the club at five o'clock. There were only two officers in the card room, one of whom—a new face to Peter—had won a great deal of money. The other, sitting with his back to the door, was dealing the cards.

The boy went closer, watching them with professional interest. There was always the chance of a tip, and he clattered the glasses busily as he removed them from the next table. The one who was losing turned around impatiently, and Peter saw that it was the cavalry officer who had thrashed him for fighting Victor Godinof outside the school.

"Stop that racket and bring two bottles of beer!" he ordered.

Peter went to the steward. "Who is the one who loses money?" he asked.

The steward grunted. "One has forgotten his name, but he snaps like a chain dog if one gets within reach!"

On the way back to the card room Peter reflected that at 5 A. M. most of the officers snapped like chain dogs. He placed a glass at each man's elbow and uncorked the beer. As he began to pour it the cavalry officer lost a trick. He slammed down the remainder of his cards so violently that he jarred Peter's elbow, and a trickle of beer splashed over onto his sleeve.

"Durak!" he shouted, and grabbed at the neck of a bottle. In doing so he knocked his glass off the table and the contents splashed over his boots.

Peter bent before the storm and hurried away for a cloth. When he returned the officer looked him over in detail. "Ah, so! One recognizes the fighting young mujik again. May one suggest that thy manners are not yet perfect? Kneel and clean my boots."

It would have been easy enough for Peter to kneel, neither had he any objection to wiping the beer-stained boot, it being merely part of his service at the club—but the memory of his previous beating still rankled. He hated this particular Chenovnik.

"I will polish thy boot gladly, Barin," he said, "but I kneel only to my saint."

He was promptly seized by the ear. There was a short struggle during which Peter's elbow rammed into the middle of the cavalry man's belt, whereupon the cavalry man closed up rather suddenly and sat down. Peter departed hastily with his cloth.

Ten minutes later he was turned out of the club, without his pay.

When evening came he went in search of Orlof. Once, Boris Evanovich had talked to him on a mountain top—perhaps he would talk to him again. . . .

But Boris Evanovich had already left town.

A week later, Peter, with the aid of his friend Danilof, attached himself to the revolutionary party as a student recruit. Thereafter, until school closed, he continued his study of Russian history from an entirely different point of view.

When school closed for the summer, he went to the station master and told him his needs. That harassed offi-

cial gave him two full minutes of his time. "So it is thy wish to go to Boris Evanovich? In the devil's name!—ten days ago while I hunted a locomotive to carry him to Nerchinsk he fell asleep in that chair. Where is he now?" —He opened his fingers and blew an imaginary substance into the air. "The taiga is a wide place! . . . However, he mentioned thee, I have by no means forgotten the fact. Be ready in an hour and I will send thee down to the junction; it is as likely a place as another in which to catch him on the wing."

So Peter spent the summer at Karimsk, the junction of the Chinese Eastern Railroad with the old Siberian line, and temporarily the transshipping point for all construction material and supplies intended for the new line.

His main business was checking freight cars, under the immediate supervision of a foreman who had served at Harbin during the period of the war; and who, consequently, knew all about the bribery and corruption that had been the chief cause of Russia's defeat. He talked indifferently about it to Peter, as though it was the natural order of affairs; and being lazy as well as careless he left it to Peter to do most of the work.

In the beginning the boy was only too willing, for every time a freight train came into the yard he felt that by doing his job efficiently he was helping Boris Evanovich to construct his road; and if cars were missing he felt almost personally to blame. But when he carried his train sheets to the foreman, who spent his days in the shade of the water tower, any shortage was dismissed with a shrug.

"Fifteen carloads of rails to-day, and only two short? Not a great matter, my son! Now in the war, whole train-

loads of ammunition and Red Cross supplies—especially Red Cross supplies—would arrive full of bricks. Houses in Harbin were built of them, so who should grumble? There was a profit at both ends!"

"Whole trainloads!—Gospodi!" Peter was surprised. "And no one punished for such a thing?"

"Punished, simpleton?—Who asks questions of a Chenovnik with a red lining to his coat?—Now here is another story for thee! The battleship *Poltava* was constructed in private yards, and when the records showed that it was finished it was commissioned and sent to sea. Three years later when war was declared it was discovered that the ship had never been built. What dost thou think of that for a joke?"

"One thinks it is a lie," Peter mantained stoutly, "for among educated ones such things would not be allowed."

The foreman took the papers that Peter had brought to him and signed them without a glance. "After all why should it be a lie?" he asked indifferently. "If thou hadst been checking freight during the war perhaps thou wouldst think differently; and as for education—to read and write a little enables one to live without overmuch work! What more does anyone want?"

Peter wanted a great deal more. He wanted Russia to be strong; and now that he had talked intimately with Gregory Danilof and had been accepted as a recruit in the revolutionary party he felt that he had found a way. He felt, also, that by keeping his eyes open he might perhaps help both Boris Evanovich and the party. More and more the party was absorbing his loyalty.

Hardly a freight train came in loaded with material

for the new road that did not show a shortage, and now that his attention had been aroused he noticed that, quite frequently, the seals on box cars had been tampered with and part of the contents taken.

The foreman dismissed it all with the same indifferent shrug. "If goods are sold up the line and charged to the new road, is it thy business, thou young fool? Canst thou carry the whole of Russia on thy head?"

No—obviously, Peter could not—but he had been born with a brain and he could think; even as he could count the carloads of Chinese coolies that poured in from the south and lay for hours, sometimes for days, waiting to be hauled away to Nerchinsk. He knew without asking the lazy foreman that these yellow men were displacing good peasant labor in the construction camps.

When it kept up for weeks he grew angry and spoke of it to the telegraph operator, who, he discovered, belonged to the party also. "Thousands of stinking Asiats flooding into the taiga," he complained, "it is not according to God! One should speak of it to the heads of the party in Chita."

The telegraph operator merely looked bored. "Thou hast still a great deal to learn, little man. The more coolies turned loose in the taiga, the more discontent! Dost thou not know that our party thrives on such things? Give thy stupid peasants low taxes and plenty of food, and freedom will never come—for until they will strike we can do little but talk. Therefore we bore from within until the fabric is rotten enough to fall. Remember that thou art still only a recruit and keep thy tongue safely inside thy head, or I shall report thee. Dost thou understand?"

Peter was troubled. If driving the peasants into starvation was a good thing for Russia then to be a revolutionary was not so simple as he had supposed. Moreover, deep down inside he was afraid. For many of the box cars which carried coolies also carried a chalk mark identical with the character on the joss stick which Ne Ah Bo had dropped. There could be no mistake—had he not once copied it for Feenga?—It made him think of the old Asiat with long nails . . . of Ne Ah Bo and the Mongol . . . and of the notebook which was stolen.

And now there were these trainloads of coolies bringing trouble to the taiga. If Boris Evanovich would only come. . . .

But Orlof did not come. He was on the north fork of White River laying out a tunnel at Bear Rocks.

CHAPTER III

THE MAKING OF A REVOLUTIONARY

TSING FENG was a Mandarin by birth, yet on the day when the ice went out he cut his nails—which was a serious thing for one of his rank to do.

Once before Tsing Feng had shortened his nails in his determination to break Russia's hold on the Manchurian wheat fields, and thereafter, in the outcome of the late war, he had achieved his greatest success. Russia had been ousted from Harbin. But Tsing Feng understood it was only a check, the Northern Bear would advance again and again—unless revolution caught him in his stride.

None knew better than Tsing Feng that the trans-Amur road would ultimately be built, but in the process of building he purposed to raise such an undercurrent of disloyalty as to hasten the revolution by ten years. For in the discontent of Russia's peasantry, rather than in open warfare, he saw his country's hope of victory in its three hundred years' struggle against the people of the north.

Part of the winter he spent in Petersburg bribing those in high places to permit the use of coolie labor in the construction of the new line; and after Christmas he crossed Siberia in the trans-continental, and spent a day and a night in Chita under the nose of His Excellency's Secret Service without their discovering that he was there. The result of this visit was an extension of revolutionary ac-

tivity under such men as Nicholai Denikin, the telegraph operator.

Thereafter, Tsing Feng went south into his own country and set an army of coolies in motion; and then, driving in leisurely fashion behind a Manchurian camel, he appeared with the last of the snows in Blagovestchensk. When the ice went out he trimmed his nails again, and also his beard, dressed himself in faded coolie clothes and took passage on the first upriver freight steamer.

Through the winter Boris Evanovich, also, had been busy. Before Christmas he had sent an army of surveyors into the taiga, and consequently was prepared for the swarm of contractors that bore down upon Chita—railroad construction was profitable under the Tsars! He left them to their prey; and busied himself in establishing his headquarters at Bear Rocks, on the north fork of White River, immediately above its junction with the main stream.

Here, the survey called for a three-hundred-foot tunnel, to be bored through solid rock. As White River was navigable for the largest poling boats until after Peter's Day, most of the supplies could be readily brought up by water. Also various hill trails converged from Kara and other river villages, which opened a way for two-wheeled carts. It was, in fact, a strategic point on the first section of the line and therefore Orlof established a settlement, which during the summer reached the dimensions of a town. Timber, also, was plentiful and before the snow was gone from the hills the forests were alive with peasants.

Boris Evanovich lost no time. He laid out the ap-

proaches to the tunnel and boring began. He built a temporary bridge across North Fork and started the right of way. He let contracts for many thousands of ties, and hoped, if all went well and politics did not interfere, to have a construction line open for locomotives before the coming of winter stopped work.

He stayed at Bear Rocks until the ice went out, then dropped down White River to organize his transport. At the mouth of the river he found his first freight steamer, unloading supplies with a gang of coolies. The man overseeing the gang was none other than Tsing Feng. If Boris Evanovich had rounded them up and shot them out of hand, he would have done Russia a good service. But he had never seen Tsing Feng, and what were a few dozen coolies more or less, when they were flooding in from Manchuria by every train?

There was a large consignment of dynamite on the steamer, and Orlof let a contract to the village Mayor to handle it, stipulating that it should be delivered at Bear Rocks in ten days. Then he requisitioned a revenue boat and left for Chita. Before he had been gone an hour the village Mayor had sublet his contract to Tsing Feng.

In Chita, Orlof went straight to the Governor.

"This swarm of coolies, Excellency—can nothing be done?"

The Governor sent Stenka for tea. "The Minister of Ways and Communications has so ordered . . . Is there anything more to be said?"

"A great deal, Excellency! I have come upriver from Kara. There is trouble brewing. Have I permission to write a formal report?"

The Governor grunted. "Write a dozen, Boris Evanovich. I will forward them all to Petersburg—with the certainty that not one of them will be read. Keep your eloquence for your contractors at this end, always remembering that they hold agreements from people in high places, and have paid out good money to procure a free hand as to how these agreements shall be carried out. Of course, if you can convince them that peasant labor is cheaper . . ."

Orlof shrugged. "One can't!—But though coolies are cheaper and more docile, and though they rarely strike, in the end it will cost more to employ them."

"You mean it will spread revolutionary ideas? Perhaps —but it makes them angry in Petersburg merely to mention the word 'revolution,' and if you anger them they will put another engineer to build your road."

The scar on Orlof's chin showed unusually plain. "Better me than another, in the interests of the peasants, Excellency. I have already let contracts to peasants for bridge timbers and many thousands of ties. Does my word stand?"

His Excellency unbuttoned the coat of his uniform. It was a well-understood sign that, for the moment at least, he ceased to be an official and spoke rather in his private capacity as friend.

"What the eye does not see, the heart does not pine for, Boris—we will forget to report such things for a while! And now, as Stenka is here with the samovar, we will drink tea and thou shalt tell me something of the boy whom we are trying to educate."

Orlof chuckled. "He has thrashed a well-born for calling him names, and he has learned a great deal of history since he came to Chita. Like the rest of the world he discusses taxes, and in his spare time he studies the manners of officers while he sweeps floors at the club. At the moment the station master has him employed at the junction, so doubtless he is checking the carloads of coolies as they arrive!"

The Governor stirred his tea slowly. "H'm! Yes! The world goes round in circles, does it not? His ancestors were originally planted on the river to hold the boundary against marauding Chinese!"

"Perhaps his contemporaries will begin hunting them again, Excellency," Orlof answered grimly.

The Governor looked beyond him at the portrait of the Tsar. "History is a curious business, Boris Evanovich!—Bring the boy to see me when it is convenient and we will see what he has absorbed since he went to school."

Orlof still looked grim as, half an hour later, he crossed the parade ground. Being a railroad man he was used to iniquity in high places, but the fact did not solve the problem that confronted him. He had not visited Ekaterina three times a week through the winter without coming to suspect that there were men in the service who would stick at nothing if they could ruin his work—and yet if he reported such matters it would involve Ekaterina and her brother Nicholai. Better under the circumstances keep silent and fight the thing out in the taiga, if necessary with bare hands.

His thoughts came round to Peter. He resolved to stop for an hour at the junction to talk to the boy, a word of

advice might keep him from questionable company. But he passed through Karimsk at 2 A. M., and before he really thought of him again the summer was gone, and Peter was back at school.

All along the right of way innumerable problems had to be solved; and when he reached his headquarters at Bear Rocks he was only just in time to avert a massacre. In his absence the peasants had staged a demonstration, turning upon a convoy of coolies with axes and kinjals; and the Chinese, most surprisingly, had retaliated, burning down part of the settlement beyond the bridge.

A lesser man than Orlof might have brought in the army to keep the peace, but he settled it alone by calling together a council of both sides and dividing the available work—all hauling and timber work to be done by the peasants, all excavation to be left to the contractors for their gangs of Chinese.

The tunnel, another bone of contention, he divided also —Russians at one end, Chinese at the other, with a bonus to the crew which accomplished most.

When both sides grumbled he quoted a proverb: *"Bez zamaska ne piyedit: Without hair oil no one goes:* if you oblige me to call in the army all hands alike will pay tribute, as is well known."

It was a patched-up peace at best, as Orlof well knew, but with luck it might last until cold weather set in. Anyway it was the best he could do. When it was all over and the men once more at work he wrote the Governor a confidential report; to which he added a postscript: "Someone has chalked a Chinese character on my door. Whether

it is a threat or a guarantee of protection remains to be seen!"

The same question had been exercising Peter at intervals for weeks. The mark that he had first seen on Ne Ah Bo's joss stick seemed to multiply exceedingly, whichever way he looked. He had come to expect it on all cars that carried coolies, and gradually his eyes began to pick it out in other less conspicuous places as well. On the door of the Chinese restaurant behind the station; on the oblong strips of gaudy paper which hung outside the Chinese houses; even once or twice he had noticed it sewn like a laundry mark on the sleeve of some coolie who had strayed from the train. Little by little, he came to feel that it was sinister—something not strictly according to God. He was apt to cross himself as a precaution when he encountered it unexpectedly in the course of his work.

And then gradually the incoming tide of coolies slowed up, and stopped. The boy turned his roving attention to other things, and in no time at all it seemed the summer passed, and one day he found himself returning to school. He carried with him in the pocket of his shirt, where all good hishniks hide their gold dust, vouchers for three months' pay.

When he reached Chita he went straight to the station master. That worthy recognized him at once. "Well, well!"—he shouted breezily. "So our young taiga rat comes home again! I'll wager my beard they taught thee a number of things about railroads down there at the junction that are not found in the regulations!"

Peter grinned. He could have enlarged on that subject,

but he thought it wiser to ask a question instead. "Is there a chance to speak with Boris Evanovich?"

The station master waved an arm. "Talk to Boris Evanovich?—Wait until the snow flies!"

"One wishes to speak to him," Peter reiterated. "Also one must obtain work, to keep from spending in a month all that one has earned."

"Work, is it?"—the station master scratched his head. "It is a bad business—here we have a railroad building, money coming into the province on every train, the town itself growing like a spring mushroom, yet everywhere peasants hunting a job!—thousands of them! Puzzle it out for thyself. Ask me for clothes; ask me for advice; or even for a very little money if thou art without food—ask me for anything but work! Or a locomotive—which last I would not supply to His Excellency himself! —What with Boris Evanovich and his trouble-making road, one is driven crazy with demands for rolling stock. . . . But thou hast an honest face, there is a chance thou wilt find something to do! Try for a week and then come to me again."

Peter went out into the street.

The station master was right; everywhere buildings had gone up, even Chinatown had burst its bounds and merged into one great slum with the rabbit warren where the railroad gangs lived, and yet at every corner peasants stood about in the gutters looking for work. It reminded Peter of a stream where hishniks had found gold—plenty for early arrivals, and then a rush of men and not enough to go round.

Always the same story!—and in the end, whether it

was hishniks or a new railroad, the contractors and vodka sellers got everything while the poor ones begged their way home.

The boy's heart burned within him. What right had he to be going to school when other men starved? Boris Evanovich and the school principal insisted that education must come to the peasants before such things could be changed. Gospodi! one would be dead! The party promised quicker results. Many of them said: "A little killing and we can frighten Chenovniks into giving up that which, by rights, belongs to all men!"

He pondered the matter while he crossed the city in search of his friend Danilof. It would seem that the party believed in education also, but for a different reason. Its slogan seemed to be: "Teach the peasants to read and write for it will make them discontented, and then perhaps they will fight for freedom."

In his heart Peter doubted such wisdom. The peasants wanted more land and fewer taxes, that was true, but "freedom" for most of them meant greater opportunity to steal and less necessity to work, with more vodka to drink.

It was all too deep for him. . . .

His thoughts wandered to the Governor—"the White Fox who lives under the hill," as the party called him. That old Chenovnik—was it his doing that thousands of coolies had flooded the taiga? Peter did not believe it for he had once looked into his eyes. There was a true man!

Finding that Gregory Danilof had left his lodgings more than a month ago, he turned back across the parade

ground, to visit Feenga. A squad of recruits was drilling, and the sight reminded him forcibly that in a little more than a year he would be drafted into the army himself. The mere thought of such a thing made him feel angry, so angry that he felt the blood tingling in the trigger finger of his right hand. He looked at it critically. Would he be willing to cut it off to avoid service, as so many others had done?

The recruits were coming toward his corner of the parade ground and he had to hurry to get out of their way. As they passed close to him he recognized them as an awkward squad of village boys. The officer who had beaten him was drilling them, and as usual seemed to be in a rage, for he threatened them with his whip.

"Tf-oo-ee!"—Peter spat furiously the moment it was safe. Such a chain dog made one glad one belonged to a party that would put a stop to such goings on. Might it be soon!

He walked defiantly off the parade ground and presently, as he passed the officers' club, he hummed the revolutionary hymn as loudly as he dared, and so he went on his way to Nicholai Denikin's yard.

But just as his hand reached out to open the gate he pulled back as though he had been stung. On the gatepost was Tsing Feng's mysterious Chinese sign. . . .

Though it was still daylight Peter's hair crinkled on his scalp. Every hishnik knew that, in the taiga, the Chinese had their secret societies and that disobedience meant death; more than once Peter had seen a Chinese corpse lying on the trail, with a curious sign cut in the skin over the heart—a warning to others, one supposed! But here

in Chita? . . . Was the presence of this mark on the gatepost a warning of death?

His thoughts leaped to Feenga and he pushed the gate open and went into the yard. Before it closed behind him he heard voices in the kitchen.

Feenga, and a man! . . .

He could hear Feenga talking excitedly, with trills of laughter interspersed—just as she had once talked and laughed when he gave her an Easter handkerchief. He went closer and recognized the man's voice as that of Gregory Danilof, his friend.

He came to a standstill in the open doorway, and for a long moment they did not see him. Feenga was absorbed with a new handkerchief, noting the effect in a mirror, and Gregory was sitting on the edge of the table, watching her, with his back toward the door.

It was Feenga who saw Peter first, as she swung away from the mirror to speak to Gregory. Her sudden change from excited laughter to embarrassed surprise caused Gregory also to swing round.

"Chort!" he shouted. "It is only thee! One thought of the police." And before Peter had fairly crossed the threshold he seized him by the shoulders and kissed him on both cheeks, as became one's intimate friend.

Feenga hovered in the background. Her eyes smoldered but she did not offer to kiss Peter nor did Peter go out of his way to greet her.

After the first rush of questions all three of them were embarrassed, not quite knowing what to do next. Then Feenga dived for the samovar, and Peter remarked:

"One got home two hours ago, and one hunted the town for thee! Then one came here."

Gregory leaned against the table. "I have moved to a new place to save money, for what with this army of peasants demanding work it is hard to keep a job that will pay enough to eat." He lowered his voice significantly. "Word came through that thou wert coming up from the junction and I have a bed for thee." He leaned closer still, almost whispering as he gave the address. Then quickly he spoke of other things.

Peter took the hint—were they not both of the party? Feenga must not hear. He asked no further questions but drank glass after glass of tea until at last Gregory was moved to go.

Peter did not go with him. He continued to sip his tea until Feenga closed the door behind his friend and came back and stood smiling shyly, fingering her new handkerchief.

As Peter said nothing she poured more tea. It was so weak it was scarcely more than tepid water but neither seemed to notice it. "Grescha has been giving me lessons," she said casually, as though it were the most ordinary thing for Peter's friends to be educating her in their spare time.

"He is a better scholar than I am," Peter agreed, without enthusiasm.

"We have talked about thee! He loves thee like a brother."

Peter's gloom, if anything, increased.

Feenga glanced at him sideways; she was beginning to enjoy herself.

"Was he not good to me while thou wert away . . . Therefore why should one not wear his handkerchief?"

Peter's shrug indicated that as far as he was concerned it was all one whose handkerchief she wore.

She toyed with the knotted ends under her chin. "Thy beard is beginning to grow, Petroushka! Soon we will have a man round the place." Her eyes added that she was no longer a baby herself.

Peter could not help responding to the look, but he tried to smother it by picking up his cap. "One must find a place to sleep," he suggested, as though the exertion of moving was rather a bore.

She accompanied him to the door, opened it for him and stood with both hands behind her holding the latch. "Thou hast not kissed me!" she suggested. Her smile was plainly mischievous, as in the old pig-herding days when a beating was a small price to pay for a day with him.

Peter's manner suggested that it was a mere oversight. "Does one then kiss thee on all occasions, now that thou hast men with beards to visit thee in thy kitchen?" He leaned down and touched her cheek with as much detachment as though he were shaking hands with a stranger.

Feenga beamed and watched him walk away toward the gate. Before he reached it she called after him. "Petroush-ka! To-morrow one will bake new bread."

"Chort!" he muttered; and added something uncomplimentary about girls.

"Bring thy history book . . . and I will put sugar in thy tea!"

The gate banged.

CHAPTER IV

AT THE SIGN OF THE DANCING GIRL

IN ANY other mood Peter would certainly have remembered the mark on the fence. When he first saw it his instinct had been to daub it over with clay, for whether it were a warning or a protection surely it were better destroyed. Asiats were heathens and their customs and their signs were undoubtedly distasteful to his saint.

But when the gate banged behind him the second time the mark was forgotten. He was coldly angry with Feenga, and he was jealous of his friend Gregory who was older and knew so much more than himself.

Grescha's uncle was a clerk in the Administration Building and therefore was of the lesser order of well-borns, a man who once a year, on Easter Sunday, put on his best uniform and presented himself at the Governor's mansion to shake hands formally under the portrait of the Tsar. Gregory himself had told Peter all about it and had explained that it was not so much an honor as a right, just as by right of birth he could go on to the university after he was done with school—whereas Peter, being a peasant, had no such right. For Peter the day would never come when he could stand under the portrait of the Tsar unless the Governor sent for him, which under no circumstances was to be accounted the same thing.

He gritted his teeth. The university was out of his reach no matter how good a scholar he became; whereas a girl like Feenga who could read and write could marry a clerk in the Administration Building and thereafter, arrayed in her holiday clothes, could go with her husband into anyone's house—peasant or no peasant.

Gospodi! but girls made him sick. . . .

He came to the end of the street and stood looking about him. Somewhere here, on the edge of the older part of the city, was the place where Gregory lived. The houses were without fences and many of them had been built on such poor foundations that they sagged, like prospecting huts after the thaw had set in. But even so they were mansions compared to the shacks that occupied the ground on the fringe of the railroad yards.

Peter took it all in critically. A year ago Chinatown had been an isolated collection of huts built along the edge of a hollow known as the swamp. But during the summer it had fanned outward, like a patch of weeds, until it merged into this rabbit warren of shacks where the railroad gangs lived. The two slums growing toward each other, on no particular plan, had pushed out a wedge along the footpath leading up to the end of the street where Peter stood.

This new street, if it could be honored by such a name, contained a number of small shops and eating houses, and undoubtedly opium dens also, and dosshouses for men who did not carry passports. Obviously no policeman in his senses would venture along it alone after dark.

And here within a stone's throw of this thieves' kitchen Gregory Danilof had chosen to live, in order, as he

said, to save money and to be able to mind his own business in his own way.

It took Peter ten minutes to ferret him out. He found him in a single-roomed hut, lying on the bed staring at the ceiling and singing softly to himself. The bed, a small table, a brick oven cracked and patched with clay, and what remained of a chicken coop was all the furniture in the room. The table was littered with books.

Gregory swung his legs over the side of the bed and sat up. He waved a welcoming hand. "Everything is thine, Petroushka! One has waited a whole month for thee."

Peter sat down on the end of the coop. "If one had an uncle one would prefer to live in his kitchen!"

Grescha strode to the window and looked out. He was a slender youth with gray eyes and a well-shaped nose and his hair waved abundantly over his forehead. Without turning round he began to talk. "That uncle thou speakest of is a pot-bellied Chenovnik who thirsts greatly after a medal. It is wiser that he should not suspect that his nephew belongs to the party."

Peter looked at his friend's profile. His very good looks made him sore, and caused him to blurt out the very thing he had most determined to keep to himself. "I do not choose that thou shalt give handkerchiefs to Feenga."

Grescha turned from the window and with both hands in his pockets looked calmly at his friend. Peter rushed on. "One day she will be my woman . . . I do not choose . . ." The sound of his own words made him quite breathless for only in the last hour had he thought of Feenga in just such a way.

Grescha continued to look at him. "One belongs to the party. One does not expect to marry."

"Chort!" . . .

His friend turned back to the window and waved a hand at the slums. "To live in such places as that—a hunted rat—is it a proper life for a girl?"

Peter was not convinced. Feenga had taken many a beating on his account and he knew that when the time came she would follow her man into worse places than Chinatown. But at the moment he thought it wiser not to stress the fact. Also his friend's devotion to the party startled him. It was like religion. He got up restlessly, and went to the door. The party expressed his dislike for officials—for in spite of His Excellency and Boris Evanovich he still distrusted Chenovniks—and yet the revolutionaries filled him with troubled thoughts. He wished he could be as certain as Grescha.

In the meantime, however, there was something practical to be done. "One must find work," he said, coming back into the room.

Gregory dropped out of the clouds. "One has spoken to Nicholai Denikin. He has a job waiting for thee in an eating house near Chinatown; it is a place where men come frequently to talk. For myself, I still work at the club. One does useful work as a spy . . . it is not my business to tell thee but twice a week I report to Nicholai at his house, therefore it was necessary to have an excuse so that Feenga should not suspect."

Deep down Peter believed his friend, but Feenga's treatment had made him skeptical. "Is the giving of hand-

kerchiefs to girls work that the party requires thee to do?" he asked sarcastically.

Gregory laughed. "What girl does not love such things?" Then, suddenly serious, he went on: "In six months they will permit thee to take the party oath, after that thou wilt do as thou art told even to the giving of handkerchiefs to girls." And Peter, listening to his voice, realized that for Grescha at least it was true, he would do without question exactly what he was told and he would do it with a light in his eyes.

The hishnik in Peter began to stir. It was not the way of the taiga to obey blindly. . . . After a pause he straightened his shoulders as though he were adjusting a load. There was still six months in which to think about oaths. Meantime——

"Where is this Nicholai to be found?" he asked.

Gregory went to the door and pointed down the hill toward the narrow thoroughfare that divided Chinatown from its neighboring slum. "Follow thy nose to the eating house on which is painted a sign of a dancing girl. The proprietor expects thee."

"Then I go!" Peter announced, putting on his cap.

But his friend stopped him. "I am to tell thee never to wear a student's uniform," he said. "Also, before it is dark one might teach thee a little geography, in case thou art called upon to carry messages. The street ends in a covered alley which emerges behind the Administration Building; over there to the left is old Chinatown which is spoken of as 'the swamp'; keep away from it unless thou hast protection. With all this fuss about employing coolies they are in an ugly mood."

As Peter walked down the hill he reflected that the peasants also were in an ugly mood for even here in this rabbit warren they kept themselves apart from the Asiats. One could tell by the manner of huts they built. The Asiats used bricks made of unburned clay while his own countrymen picked up material around the yards—worn-out railroad ties, remnants of discarded box cars, odd pieces of lumber, boxes, crates—anything in a word that they could steal.

The thoroughfare which wandered up from the rear of the Administration Building was a sort of international boundary line between the two races. On one side were Chinese shops and opium dens, on the other, Russian eating houses and various resorts of a more questionable nature. Quite a number of the Russian shacks were built of logs which Peter was shrewd enough to surmise had originally been cut for telegraph poles. The street itself was crowded with both nationalities, through which he pushed his way until he came to the sign of the dancing girl. He pushed open the swing door and went inside.

He found himself in a long room, part restaurant, part gambling house, with a dancing floor and stage at the far end. It was still too early to be crowded, and the proprietor, a huge stoop-shouldered Ukranian, leaned against the buffet eating a salted cucumber and drinking a glass of beer. He saw Peter at once but took no notice of him until the boy crossed the room and spoke to him.

He continued to eat his cucumber while Peter stated his business, and afterward picked a tooth with his fingernail as he looked him over. "Who sent thee?" he asked.

There was an air of conspiracy about the place which

gave Peter caution. "The Sign of the Dancing Girl was mentioned," he said, glancing instinctively at two men who were playing cards.

"Humph!"—The Ukranian finished his cucumber at one huge bite, then led the way to the back of the room, round behind the stage, and out through a door into a fair-sized courtyard. On one side was a storehouse, on the other living quarters. The two buildings connected at the back with a high board fence, which to the casual glance gave no sign of an outlet.

The living quarters had two doors opening into the yard. The first was ajar and the Ukranian pointed to it as they went by. "Thou canst sleep in there if thou art used to fleas," he remarked. Peter said nothing and they passed on to the second door and went inside.

It was evidently an anteroom opening into some sort of office beyond, and was bare of all furniture whatsoever. The guide crossed the floor and knocked at the closed inner door. There was a movement inside then an eye appeared for a moment at a small peephole, after which a bar was removed and Nicholai Denikin stood on the open threshold. "What is it?" he asked.

The Ukranian indicated Peter with a jerk of his thumb.

"Ah, thee!"—Nicholai looked at him and smiled.

He was a slim, stooping, spectacled man, well over forty and almost entirely bald, but his teeth were unusually good and his hands, which he constantly used when he talked, were as sensitive as those of a well-bred woman. Peter had seen him at a distance many times and had heard him spoken of reverently by those who belonged to the party; but he scarcely noted details now, for the

eyes behind their glasses held his attention. They reminded him of a priest before the altar, and subtly, silently, they challenged his loyalty to the cause.

"Come in!" he said.

The Ukranian grunted and disappeared, while Peter followed Denikin and the door closed behind them.

The room was a small one. It contained a stove, a table on which stood a candle stuck into a bottle, half-a-dozen boxes for chairs, and one shuttered window opening onto the yard. The shutter was fastened and locked inside. Overhead, in the ceiling, was a trap door.

Denikin sat down. "Grescha reports well of thee!" he said. "But at present thou art only a recruit and a little experience will do thee good, for the way of a revolutionary is not easy and perhaps thou mayst change thy mind. We keep only those who believe in our cause."

Peter grinned his friendliest grin, and Nicholai took it to mean acceptance for he went straight on: "Canst thou keep silent?"

"One was born in the taiga; hishniks do not talk easily, Barin."

"Call me Tovarish," Nicholai corrected him. "There is a job for thee in the eating house. We have different manners from the officers' club, as thou wilt soon learn. It will be thy business to remember faces, to listen to what is said, and when necessary to report to me. On occasion thou wilt carry messages. If thou art questioned thou knowest me only as an operator in the telegraph service. At school it must not be known that thou comest to the Sign of the Dancing Girl; and mark thee, Feenga, who works in my kitchen, must suspect nothing at all."

Peter looked thoughtful. "One gives Feenga lessons, Bar—Tovarish—if one stops she will become curious."

Nicholai looked at him steadily. "It will be a way to test thee. Continue to teach her, and remember that thou wilt be watched. Is it understood?—Then go, for I am busy."

Peter went out into the yard with all his senses alert. If the great ones of the party met in this back room there must certainly be some ready means of escape. The only visible exit was through the restaurant into the street, which would be useless in case of a raid. He looked appraisingly at the high board fence, to climb it one would need a ladder. Then he remembered the trap door in the inner room.

Ach, so! It gave him a comfortable feeling and he began to hum the revolutionary hymn.

As Nicholai had suggested, the manners of those who patronized the Sign of the Dancing Girl were different from those who frequented the officers' club.

A constant stream of humanity poured through the swing doors. Manchurians from the wheat fields, Chinese from the Empire, Mongols and Buriats from the highlands of the Gobi mixed freely with representatives of the hundred or more nationalities that gave willing or unwilling allegiance to the Tsar.

In the past, gold had attracted adventurous spirits to the province; now the extension of the railroad had brought a flood of newcomers bent on sharing in the profitable business. Something, however, had missed fire.

Tsing Feng and those radical members of the party who did his bidding had put their fingers into the pie. As the winter crept down from the taiga it found cities overflowing, the railroad glutted with peasants returning to their homes, and trouble brewing for the "old White Fox" in the mansion under the hill.

Peter sensed something of all this as he went about his work. For those who came to the Sign of the Dancing Girl were discontented spirits, men who cursed their country and swore at the waiters, and while their money lasted gambled for high stakes; or sat in corners to talk in whispers; or quarreled, to the accompaniment of flying beer bottles and broken chairs.

Among them were secretive men, who arrived singly or in pairs, to disappear presently behind the stage. Little by little Peter came to recognize these men as chosen members of the party. Not infrequently he was called upon to carry food and drink to the shuttered room in the corner of the courtyard.

Occasionally he recognized faces he had seen at the club, not smartly dressed officers now, but men disguised as shabby storekeepers or petty clerks; the military bearing, however, was harder to conceal. He became expert at picking them out in the crowd and reporting their presence to Nicholai who rarely missed spending a portion of the evening in the little back room.

Once, on the night of the first hard frost, he was startled into dropping a plate by finding himself in the act of serving none other than "the Stranger with Blue Eyes." He was dressed like a hundred other peasants in the room but there was no mistaking the blueness of

those eyes. Peter had long since discovered that he was the head of the Governor's Secret Service in Chita, and though he had been cautioned by Nicholai never to disturb a meeting in the back room, for once he disobeyed orders. He did not fail to notice that none of the occupants of the back room left the building by the front door.

It was two nights later that, as he was about to go off duty, a man who looked like a storekeeper's clerk stopped him and ordered more beer. Peter grumbled under his breath. He had already carried the fat hog half-a-dozen bottles in the last couple of hours. Would he never get drunk and go home? It was not as though he were a friendly mujik having a good time; on the contrary he sat guzzling alone, wherefore Peter put the bottle down with a bang and waited with ill-concealed impatience for his payment.

The fat man gave him a tip.

Tips were so rare at the Sign of the Dancing Girl that Peter inspected him with altogether new curiosity. He was vaguely troubled with a feeling that he had seen the fellow before and he was still searching his memory when the man beckoned him closer and spoke to him under his breath. He was more than a little fuddled with beer.

"Boy, dost thou wish to earn five roubles for a small service, and for the trifling matter of holding thy tongue?"

Five roubles spelled riches and Peter's fingers itched. "Of a certainty one can keep silent for a much smaller sum, Barin!"

The fat man beckoned him closer still and whispered

Denikin's address. "Go to the house and ask for one Nicholai! Say to him one waits for him here at this time to-morrow—is it understood? Say also it will be profitable to come!"

Peter controlled his face. "This Nicholai, he will desire to know who asks for him."

The fat man eyed him with cunning. "Curiosity is better than a name!"—And finishing his beer he pushed the table out of the way and stood up to go.

Peter stared after him. Surely that walk was familiar. . . . He pocketed his tip and pondered the matter deeply all the way home.

Grescha was already in bed, but he was in talkative mood. Peter was inattentive. If the fat man was a Chenovnik in disguise curiosity might lead Nicholai into a trap. He kicked off his clothes and tumbled into bed. Presently Grescha went to sleep, but he lay awake for a long time thinking and in the darkness memory came to him . . . it was the writer who went with the Governor to the Foreigner's mine!

The discovery made him uncomfortable, and lying there beside Gregory, the enthusiastic revolutionary, he came to the painful realization that his own loyalty was divided. It was a long time before he went to sleep. The thought that this fat hog was a spy in the Governor's establishment angered him. Yet Nicholai trusted him, he must be warned. . . . He tossed restlessly.

At the earliest possible moment after school he went to Denikin's house. Hitherto he had always gone straight to the kitchen. This time he stopped at the front door and knocked. Ekaterina opened it.

She was surprised. "Why, Peter—is Feenga then not in the kitchen?"

"One wishes to speak to thy brother," he answered.

A question leaped into her eyes. It disconcerted them both.

"I will tell Nicholai," she said quietly.

Peter looked a little anxiously at the kitchen door. It would be hard to explain to Feenga if she saw him, and rather than face the possibility he strolled back to the gate. There was the Chinese character still on the post! Somehow it relieved his feelings to daub it over with mud. He had finished before Nicholai appeared.

He explained his errand standing in the middle of the gateway. "And, Tovarish, if my saint has given me eyes it is the fat one who writes for the Governor."

"Plotnikof!"—Nicholai breathed the name softly as though he had waited to hear it for a long time. "I will come early to-night." He went straight out into the street for, seemingly, the news had given him something to do.

Peter followed. He was in no mood to give Feenga a lesson just then. But if he had looked back he would have seen her watching from the kitchen doorway.

She frowned, and crossed herself. So many people came to see Nicholai . . . and now, Peter! . . . She was afraid.

CHAPTER V

DIVIDED LOYALTY

PETER reached the Sign of the Dancing Girl long before his usual hour. Perhaps, as Plotnikof had suggested, it was curiosity that brought him. Curiosity and restlessness. But the crowd was greater than usual, and he had little time to indulge his thoughts.

Half an hour passed, and Nicholai appeared unexpectedly at his elbow and signaled him to follow to the back room.

As the door closed he was surprised to see the fat Secretary seated behind the table drinking beer. His restlessness increased, partly, perhaps, because both men took his presence so completely for granted.

"Is it agreed, then?" Nicholai asked.

Plotnikof answered without raising his eyes. "If you hurry! I am supposed to be at supper. In one little hour or so I must be back at my post."

Nicholai turned at once to Peter. "One sends thee on an errand, Tovarish—an errand that to-morrow thou wilt forget! Art thou willing to go?"

The discomfort in Peter's mind flared up into an angry dislike for this pig of a secretary and all he stood for. But Nicholai was looking at him with the eyes of a priest before the altar . . . and an inner voice curiously like

Boris Evanovich's seemed to speak to him: "Better thee than another! . . ."

"Certainly I go, Tovarish," he heard himself say.

"Then, come!"—Nicholai closed the door behind him and led him out into the middle of the yard. "Now, listen carefully, and young as thou art thou wilt be of great service to the party. About a hundred paces down the street is an alley opening off to the right, at the end of the alley is a Chinese lantern hanging over a door. Thou canst not mistake it for there is only one. Knock on the door twice. It will be opened by a Chinaman to whom thou wilt give this." He thrust a short round ebony stick about five inches long into Peter's hand. "Say nothing, and come back at once to me. Now, hurry!"

As Peter pushed his way through the crowded restaurant out into the street the joss stick burned into his palm. For without even a glance he knew that he carried the mark of the Asiat with long nails. His thoughts whirled like a covey of rabchick until he stood under the lantern which, as he had foreseen, carried the same mysterious sign.

Almost before he was aware of it a tall coolie stood in the open doorway. He looked quietly at the joss stick, then his hand came forward and took it, the door closed, and Peter was alone again.

The lantern overhead made an oblong pool of light in the darkness of the alley, in the midst of which his own shadow and the shadow of the mysterious sign faced each other and moved backward and forward with the swaying of the lantern.

Through much reading of history Peter had learned

the meaning of treason. The word haunted him now. Surely to carry messages secretly, at night, from the Governor's secretary to this Asiat with long nails—the man who had sent Ne Ah Bo into the taiga to steal the map —surely such a thing was treason; and how could treason help to make Russia strong? And yet Nicholai had eyes which were like the eyes of a priest before the altar; and Nicholai was depending on his silence.

His soul burned. At that moment he felt he would gladly have given his chance of an education to talk with Boris Evanovich; or the Foreigner. It was all too deep and complicated for a hishnik's son.

He moved away from the pool of light into the darkness of the alley, feeling as he had once felt when, quite unexpectedly, he had come upon a she-bear with two cubs. No decent hunter would willingly shoot a mother bear with cubs, and yet it was dangerous to run. In such a case one stood one's ground and saw the adventure through.

He hurried back to report and was told to wait in the yard.

The next ten minutes tried his patience to breaking point, for nothing happened. But in the little back room it was otherwise.

No sooner was the door closed than Nicholai requested Plotnikof to come out from behind the table. "The trap door above your head is about to be opened," he said. "I am afraid that dust may fall into your beer."

The Secretary grunted. "Is this secrecy intended to impress me?" he asked with dull sarcasm.

Nicholai shrugged. "Why, no! but one has no wish to make His Excellency's Secret Service curious."

While he was speaking the trap door was lifted and a pebble dropped on Plotnikof's head. The fat man hoisted himself up by the edge of the table and stood back against the wall. As he did so a ladder was let down, and a tall and very dirty coolie descended into the room.

The coolie bowed to both men. "You sent for me?" he asked.

Plotnikof went back to his seat. "I sent for Tsing Feng," he answered pointedly. "I do my business with no one else."

The coolie remained standing. "You may consider you are doing business with him now, or if you prefer you may assume that you are speaking to his deputy. It is as near to the truth as you are likely to come. Tsing Feng does not go undisguised in Chita, nor does he declare himself openly to His Excellency's secretary."

Plotnikof bowed ironically. "Then I go home!"

"That will be foolish, seeing that you need a thousand roubles to pay your gambling debts."

In the act of rising the Secretary sat down again, and the Chinaman went on: "Shall I give you some more proof that I am well informed?—Three weeks ago His Excellency wrote a report to Petersburg in which he requested a free hand in dealing with coolie labor. Perhaps you took a copy which you have risked coming here to sell? Mr. Secretary, that document is not worth ten kopeks, for His Excellency's request has been refused."

Plotnikof's face turned a dull red. To cover his confusion he poured some more beer. "How very interesting, pray go on!"

"Granting it is so," the Chinaman continued, "one may hazard a further guess that His Excellency will communicate with Petersburg by to-night's mail. But the Transcontinental is ten hours late and there is time for a clever secretary to procure a copy of that document before it is despatched. If this is done Tsing Feng authorizes me to pay a thousand roubles."

For thirty seconds the only sound in the room was the fat man's breathing. Then he made a sweeping movement with both hands. "These revolutionaries keep you well informed, Mr. Tsing Feng's deputy. As it happens I have seen the draft of such a letter . . . a copy can possibly be secured, but it is too risky to come here a second time to-night. You must send a messenger." He looked at his watch. "I will meet him in the pine grove beyond the main gate, and he must bring cash. Otherwise, nothing!"

"Quite so"—Nicholai spoke for the first time since the trap door had been lifted. "But can we trust you? It will be too dark and too risky to attempt to verify the contents of the letter so near to His Excellency's front door."

Plotnikof shrugged. "Seemingly it is a risk you must take."

The coolie looked at him. "And on the other hand it will be most extraordinarily risky to play Tsing Feng false."

Plotnikof swallowed. "I will meet your man at the pine grove."

The coolie nodded, and the fat man let himself out.

Nicholai closed the door. "This is important, I will go for the letter myself."

The Chinaman stopped him with a gesture. "I think not, Nakeetin is restless; and we need you. Send someone whom he does not suspect."

"He suspects most of us," Nicholai answered, "and are we not all needed? There is of course the boy! At one time apparently he was a sort of protégé of the Governor, but during the present excitement he is forgotten. Probably he resents it. In any case, since he came to Chita he has seen enough of the pleasant little ways of Chenovniks, and is so angry at this invasion of coolies into his beloved taiga that he has become a loyal party recruit."

The Chinaman smiled. "Send the boy . . . if he is caught we can afford to lose him; if not, we will have put the mark of a revolutionary on him for he will be outside the law."

Nicholai's eyes saw far beyond the confines of the room. He said nothing but he nodded agreement.

When Plotnikof crossed the yard and disappeared into the restaurant Peter spat after him with vigor. During the interminable waiting his confused emotions had concentrated into an angry determination to discover, if possible, what brought this fat polecat to grub in the filth of Chinatown. Wherefore he was more than eager to go when Nicholai called him into the back room.

Nicholai explained what was required of him. "Take this package," he said. "It is valuable and must on no account be lost or taken from thee. Go to the grove of pines near the entrance to the Governor's residence, and wait—until midnight if necessary—for this man Plotnikof to come. He will give thee a letter in exchange for the pack-

age. Thou wilt bring that letter here to me in this room. Is it understood?"

"Yes, Tovarish!"

"And if thou art caught, thou wilt say nothing?"

"No, Tovarish!"

The eyes that reminded Peter of a priest at the altar burned into his. "It will be thy service to Russia . . . thou wilt swear it on thy cross?"

"Yes, Tovarish!"

Like most peasants, Peter, since babyhood, had carried a cross attached to a fine chain suspended from his neck. He opened his shirt and exposed it.

Nicholai raised his right hand. "As I believe in God, and desire that freedom may come to Russia, I swear to tell no one what I have learned. . . ."

Peter repeated the oath. Then devoutly he kissed his cross.

As he did so he raised his eyes and saw Nicholai's slender index finger pointing upward toward the trap door. The remaining three fingers and thumb were bunched loosely across his palm. They partly concealed a short round ebony stick about five inches long.

The oath that Peter had just taken receded into the background. He was staring again at the mark of the Asiat with long nails.

CHAPTER VI

BENEATH THE PORTRAIT OF THE TSAR

ALL the instincts of the taiga were alert in Peter as he set out from the Sign of the Dancing Girl. His destination was the pine grove under the hills, and something deep stirred in him as he sniffed the night breeze. Consciously, however, his thoughts were still with the joss stick in Nicholai's hand.

So that was the way of it! Without doubt Tsing Feng had come in through the trap door to bargain with Plotnikof, while he had been waiting in the yard. A package in exchange for a letter . . . the package was under his shirt now, it crinkled slightly when he pressed it. He stopped short. Money! . . . bribery! . . . Tsing Feng bribing the pig of a secretary. And he had taken an oath of silence. . . .

Like all peasants the boy was instinctively loyal to the Tsar. He thought of such a one almost as he thought of God. Even the noisiest members of the party spoke gently of the Tsar and, with Peter at least, the Governor shared the loyalty accorded the "Little Father."

Bribery was in the natural order of things—where in all the taiga was there an official, or anyone else for that matter, who did not on occasion give or accept a bribe? —but for such a one as Tsing Feng, an enemy of Russia,

a lousy Asiat, to bribe the Governor's trusted secretary. That was like spitting in church. . . .

The package rustled under his shirt. Either the Asiat used the party, or the party used the Asiat . . . and whatever the truth the coolies flooded the taiga.

His anger mounted with every step he took and in the white light of that anger he looked back over his past. His lifelong hatred of officials . . . the treatment he had received from his schoolfellows . . . the rottenness of the railroad administration . . . the peasants who could not find work . . . Such things goaded his sense of injustice, and finally had driven him into the party.

But what did anyone know? . . . On one side stood Boris Evanovich and the Governor—on the other Grescha and Nicholai—and somewhere in between stood Russia, waiting to be served. The thought of his oath was bitter as wild gentian root on the tongue, but there it was! In that shuttered room with Nicholai's eyes burning into his it had seemed strictly according to God; while out here under the immensity of the stars the great soul of Russia seemed to call on him insistently to reconsider.

His fingers felt the outline of the cross under his shirt, and the night whispered a great truth: "When all men stand divided, one must make one's own choice. . . ."

It must be as it was when one was lost in the taiga—one must follow one's own deep sense of direction rather than the first trail that beckoned an easy way. Was it perhaps for this that he had sought an education? . . .

An officer came out of the guard room and he merged into the grove of trees. For half an hour, not thinking at all, he lay hidden until Plotnikof appeared. Only when a

fat man's breathing was near enough to be heard did he show himself.

The exchange was made in silence, and the boy returned the way he had come. But when he reached the school he turned in behind the building and, in the angle of the back porch, he made a small fire of matches. There, carefully sheltering the flickering light, he opened and read the letter intended for Tsing Feng.

It was addressed to some high-born with many titles, and as it was couched in official language much of it was obscure to Peter, but this much was plain: the Governor had sought authority to drive the coolies out of the taiga and had been refused; now he requested permission to resign.

Very solemnly Peter put the letter under his shirt and stood thinking. An oath was in very truth an oath, and if one broke it one's saint would be justly angry, therefore one must remain silent. But beyond silence he could not go. Deeper than his loyalty to Nicholai and the party stood his loyalty to his own kind, and to Boris Evanovich, and through him to the Governor up there beyond the parade ground.

Long ago, in the hishnik camp, he had drunk vodka, and the trail thus started had led him to Tsing Feng . . . now the same trail with many windings led him to the Governor. Out in the taiga one was a hishnik, here in Chita one belonged to the party, nonetheless the white-haired old Chenovnik must be protected from all lousy Asiats with long nails. He turned back toward the parade ground.

What puzzled him was how to get speech with the great one, for the light in the guard-house window warned him of difficulties in the way. If he walked boldly up to the door and demanded admission, they would certainly beat him and take the letter away, and presently a lot of officers would be gossiping at the club. This matter concerned only the Governor. He sought cover in the pine grove and set himself patiently to watch.

At the end of ten minutes a side door opened and a man appeared. He carried a mail pouch. Peter's heart bounded, for he thought he recognized the tall Cossack who had been with the Governor in Blagovestchensk. A few feet from the door he stopped, to see if he were followed.

It was so exactly what Peter would have done himself that he understood perfectly, yet even so he risked detection by creeping closer. If only he could make sure it was Stenka.

The old Cossack lit a match and applied it to the end of a cigarette—then Peter was sure. He moved quickly into the little circle of light.

While the match still burned they looked at each other. Not a muscle of either face moved. Stenka spoke first.

"Ach, so! It is the young timber rat!"

Peter answered a little breathlessly. "For the love of thy saint—take me to him!"

Stenka hissed through his teeth. "If the sergeant find thee thou wilt sleep in jail!"

In his urgency Peter beat his hands together. "Thou wilt take me to him—I have writing which none but he may read!"

The Cossack puffed at his cigarette. "So—thou hast a paper?"

Peter touched his shirt. "It is for him only!"

Stenka's left hand shot forward and gripped the boy's shoulder. "Hand it over quietly and thou shalt go home."

Peter did not move. "If thou art a fool thou wilt make a noise. I give it only to him."

This time it was Stenka who did not move. Peter went on. "Boris Evanovich calls thee the Old One's watchdog."

The Cossack laughed. "A true word—and look you, watchdogs can bite! I will take thee, but when presently he orders thee a beating I shall attend to it myself. I have still a little account of my own to settle which I do not forget."

In the darkness Peter grinned. He was expecting worse than a beating, but that was in the hands of God.

They went in silence along many yards of dimly lighted corridor until they came to a great double doorway. Here Stenka stopped. "Now—the writing!"

Peter shook his head.

Stenka looked at him with something approaching respect, and said nothing more. He knocked and pushed this mad one in ahead of him.

As was his habit the Governor was pacing the floor. He paused halfway down the room. "Well?"—Plainly he was annoyed. His glance fell first on Stenka, then on the mail pouch hanging from his arm, and lastly on Peter. For a moment he was obviously puzzled, then he stiffened into recollection. "What brings thee back, Stenka?"

"This young one——" the Cossack began.

Peter made an impulsive step forward, only to feel a firm hand on his shoulder. "Stand where thou art!" Stenka cautioned.

"Yes?" The Governor was significantly quiet.

The boy's head lifted. "Barin!—Excellency!—One has come by a paper which is only for thee." His fingers groped under his shirt, but though they obviously gripped something they remained hidden. The watchdog's hand bore down more heavily still and Peter moved impatiently. "Durak, dost thou suppose it is a bomb!"

He pulled out an envelope and at the same moment twisted himself free.

Stenka leaped after him with a growl, but the Governor interfered. "We waste time! Let him give it to me."

The boy moved forward as though he were walking his own hills. Doubtless he knew it was proper to salute, but he did not do so. His eyes were level with the Governor's, too excited to be afraid. "One has read it," he said simply, "therefore one understood it was only for thee!"

The Governor took the envelope and looked at the enclosure; then, with stark surprise, at Peter. "What——" but he checked himself and looked again. There was a period of complete quiet as he put it back into its envelope. Even then he stood thinking before he said, without particular emphasis: "Where did you get this, my boy?"

Peter's eyes withdrew behind a screen. "Barin, one has taken an oath to say nothing!"

"Ah!"—His Excellency's eyes were fixed full on him. "I see. . . . Then why dost thou bring it to me?"

The boy's gaze shifted uneasily to the portrait of the

Tsar, and back to the white-haired old Chenovnik who had sent him to school. "Barin, how shall one say?—thou art a true man—one brought it to thee."

His Excellency's glance also veered to the portrait, then back to Peter and from Peter to the envelope. The sight of the envelope brought him to the urgency of the matter in hand. "Stand over there!—Stenka, the mail pouch!—Empty it out on the table."

With deft fingers he sorted over the contents, extracted an official envelope and broke the seal. For a few seconds he compared the original with the copy and the frown that gathered caused old Stenka to stop breathing.

He reached for the telephone, only to return it to its hook. "Not safe!" . . . It was hardly a whisper. He stood silent, evidently weighing possibilities, then he swept the two letters into a drawer.

"Stenka, put the mail back into the pouch!" He wrote a few lines. "Listen—send Nakeetin to me immediately. Give this writing to the officer on guard and see that the mail is delivered to the station master himself. Then come back here. Hurry!—No, never mind the boy. Go!"

The door closed and His Excellency sat down in his throne-like chair. "Now, come here, boy—thy name is Peter, if I recollect!"

Peter's first excitement in coming into the presence of this great one had subsided. He was unhappy and more than a little afraid as he approached to within four feet of the Governor, but even so there was evident none of the usual servility of the mujik. He looked the old eagle straight in the eye.

"Yes, Excellency!"

"Who gave thee that letter?"

"Barin, one has taken an oath!"

"Then why didst thou bring it to me?"

The movement of the boy's shoulders suggested a troubled mind. "One swore to keep silent, Barin, but one also read the letter—it is not according to God that such as thee should be betrayed."

"If someone trusted thee as a messenger why didst thou read the paper which is not intended for thee?"

"Barin!"—Peter's voice rang with certainty—"at the bottom of the matter is the Asiat with long nails who is known as Tsing Feng, the one who sent Ne Ah Bo to steal the map. It is plain he is an enemy."

The Governor settled himself in his chair. It enabled him to watch Peter's face closely without seeming to do so. "Doubtless he is an enemy of Russia—and yet the revolutionary party sent thee with this Asiat's money to bribe those whom I employ."

It was a chance shot based on a lifelong experience of Tsing Feng's machinations, but it hit the mark for Peter's face became wooden with seeming stupidity. "What do I know, Barin?"

For answer His Excellency looked at his watch. In spite of Peter's oath of silence he had learned the essentials. He lapsed into thought while he waited for Nakeetin to come and unravel the details.

Two people, then, knew of his proposed resignation. One of these, Plotnikof, he could silence through fear, also without doubt he could frighten him to a full confession of the little he knew—a dirty business which Nakeetin could handle for him.

Not so this boy, however. For all his peasant ignorance this boy whom he was undertaking to educate attempted to think things out for himself; and in so doing found his loyalty sadly divided between his dream of a free Russia and his instinctive loyalty to the Tsar. His Excellency sighed.

"Thou hast done me a service, Peter, therefore I will respect thy silence, but the letter thou hast read must forever remain a trust between us two. It is understood?"

"Yes, Excellency!"

"Shall we swear it together before the picture of the Tsar? . . ."

Peter saluted with tears in his eyes, and then, like Boris Evanovich on a former occasion, he saluted the white-haired old man beside him. "Barin, many things are difficult to understand, but my service is also to thee!"

Just what the Governor might have answered remained uncertain for at that moment the officer of the guard ushered Plotnikof into the room. The Secretary, though obviously anxious, carried himself haughtily until he saw Peter. Then he collapsed.

His Excellency scarcely noticed him. "Have this boy taken to my kitchen. See that he gets something to eat, and is not questioned. I shall want him again presently. Return at once."

Five minutes later when the officer returned Plotnikof was on his knees and the Governor sat at the table writing.

"Lock this man up, and hold yourself in readiness for orders!"

With the sheet of paper in his hand His Excellency paced the floor until Nakeetin arrived. They met in the middle of the room.

In short staccato sentences His Excellency gave his Secret Service man an account of all that had happened. "Here is Plotnikof's confession—full of lies and omissions, probably! This man Nicholai Denikin and of course Tsing Feng are the leaders. I did not try to telephone as doubtless the wires were tapped."

Nakeetin looked over the confession. "Much of this is guesswork—a bid for sympathy! But I have watched Nicholai Denikin for a long time. He is a strong man. If I can catch him and Tsing Feng the local party will be without leaders."

"You will not catch Tsing Feng," the Governor answered dryly.

Nakeetin thrust the confession into his pocket and hurried away.

The Governor continued his pacing, and like Peter earlier in the evening his thoughts ran back through the years. In the old days he had been impatient of those reactionary officials who blocked reform, and he had made no secret of his belief that education would succeed where repression had failed. But his opinions had been frowned upon. And since the head of the Shustof family could not be suppressed like a village mayor, the little group who surrounded the Tsar had appointed him to an eastern province. In the days before the railroad this amounted to banishment.

He had administered the province for many years now, and was no longer in a hurry—but he still stood firm in

his conviction that Russia needed schools rather than an army of secret police.

He sat down. Take this boy, Peter, for instance—a symbol of Young Russia. Deny him the right to think for himself, let the crude hand of stupid officialdom thrust him back into the mud, and one produced a revolutionary. Take Nicholai Denikin—doubtless once a man of promise—now a fugitive and a tool of Tsing Feng. Of all tragic waste, surely revolution was the worst. . . .

He squared his shoulders. In the face of this challenge from his old enemy his resignation should not be presented until the railroad was built. He took his letter from the drawer and tore it across.

"To-morrow I send for Orlof, and I will clean up this coolie question with or without authority, and fight it out later with Petersburg!"

Almost, it appeared, he was going to enjoy the fight.

CHAPTER VII

BEAR ROCKS

AT EIGHT o'clock next morning, when the Governor was drinking tea, Nakeetin returned. In answer to His Excellency's unspoken question he announced his failure with a shrug.

"Just as one supposed, Excellency, Tsing Feng has disappeared into thin air. Nicholai Denikin, the leader and brains of the local party, has also escaped down the line toward Manchuria. I have wired everywhere, but with half the telegraph service in sympathy we will accomplish little. For the rest I have scoured Chinatown and arrested a number of malcontents of no particular importance. They await your pleasure in jail. Denikin's sister and the girl who worked in her kitchen are held for questioning; also the boy, Peter, is officially under arrest to protect him from Denikin's friends."

His Excellency listened attentively. "Quite so! Meantime, my old friend Tsing Feng will not take such a setback tamely, and as this coolie question has been the cause of most of the present mischief we may expect another blow from the same direction. Notify Orlof at once!"

"I have attempted to do so, Excellency, but the wires are down north of Nerchinsk. The station master reports that they went out after midnight."

The Governor looked very thoughtful indeed. "What do you advise?"

"That I go at once to Bear Rocks, Excellency."

"But unfortunately you are known to every friend of Denikin's between here and Harbin."

"I have thought of that. There is Stenka . . ."

The Governor looked impatient. "My body servant? —To send him would be to proclaim our purpose with a flag."

The answer did not seem to perturb Nakeetin in the least; perhaps his intention had been to prepare the Governor for his next suggestion: "In my service, Excellency, the unexpected occasionally succeeds: Send this boy, Peter! The gossip is that he has been arrested. It will be simple to start another rumor that he has escaped. Later, if it is so ordered, he can be paroled and sent back to school. But can one trust him?"

The Governor returned to his tea. "He would shed his skin for Boris Evanovich! Send him to me."

A very resolute Peter marched beside old Stenka as the two emerged from the Governor's residence at the time of morning parade. Stenka was deeply annoyed; he had received secret instructions to lose the boy in Chinatown and, later, report the matter to the officer of the guard. He growled into his mustache.

"In my day young rebels were strung up by the thumbs."

Peter, no longer in the disturbing presence of the great one, humped his nearest shoulder offensively. Was he not hurrying to Boris Evanovich with a letter from His Ex-

cellency to warn him of Tsing Feng!—why heed this old fool of a Cossack buzzing in his ear?

"In thy day, durak, thou wert herding pigs! Shut thy mouth and bear to the left. I wish to go to my house."

Stenka continued to buzz like a horsefly, but he followed directions.

Peter insisted on entering the shack alone. He wished to warn his friend, Grescha, if by chance he was there; but the room was empty. The police had raided it for evidence, and had taken not only all revolutionary literature but practically all their belongings as well. Peter was not surprised—the ways of police were familiar enough.

With hardly a glance at the room he went to a corner and inserted his fingers into a crack between two logs. For a moment his face went tense and then with a grunt of extreme satisfaction he produced Ne Ah Bo's joss stick. In thirty seconds he was back on the threshold.

He looked toward the freight yards, impatient to be off on his quest. A train of box cars was coming to rest near the water tower; without doubt, they would be changing the locomotive. Knowing the way of freight trains he saw here a chance to get down to the junction, or even if lucky to Nerchinsk.

"Step up, Cossack," he ordered. "One is ready to go."

Stenka was lighting a cigarette. "Bolt, thou young limb—and hereafter may the devil attend to his own."

Peter bolted; and when in due course the train of box cars continued its journey it carried at least one passenger who had neglected to pay his fare.

During the next three days several things happened which Peter could attribute only to the direct interven-

tion of his saint. But had he been present at a certain interchange of confidences between Nakeetin and the station master he might have found enlightenment. However that may be, the freight train did not turn south at Karimsk but continued directly to Nerchinsk. Here, the new line was not open for traffic and Peter was prepared for vexatious delays, but within an hour the conductor of a light supply train bore down upon him, cursing all drunken firemen, and offered him a job.

This happy accident carried him over the Divide as far as the rails had been laid, which was a point some thirty versts from the tunnel at Bear Rocks.

He spent the evening in a large shed which did duty as a sort of makeshift Sign of the Dancing Girl. Here, food and drink—especially drink—and gambling were in evidence; and men wandered in from every section of the line. Peter, warming himself inconspicuously in the vicinity of the stove, and absorbing the atmosphere of the crowd as readily as a sponge absorbs water, soon came to understand that something was brewing—something which boded no good.

Three weeks' continuous frost had slowed up operations. Directly the snow came many departments would close down, leaving only a winter force in the timber; and under Orlof's arrangement with the contractors all timber work was to be exclusively for Russians. Men watched the weather and waited for the exodus of coolies to begin. . . .

Then a rumor drifted through the taiga that ways had been found to employ the Chinese until the spring. Whispers of reprisals sprang up over night. Peter, listening,

heard men remind each other of the famous, or infamous, massacre at Blagovestchensk. He got the drift of it all indifferently enough—to run the Chinese out of the taiga was God's work as far as he was concerned—but little by little he absorbed additional information which filled him with wrath.

Two telegraph clerks who, undoubtedly, were both members of the party, and who like himself sat inconspicuously in the shadow of the stove, talked intermittently for an hour; and if he could believe the whispers and half-finished sentences which reached him, the lousy coolies were preparing to resist, and not only to resist but so to plan their devil's work that the peasants would bear the brunt of subsequent official displeasure.

He worried over the news for a long time before he went to sleep; and when he did drop off, because he was responsible for the safe delivery of His Excellency's letter, he slept lightly, and long before daylight was heading across country for Bear Rocks.

To avoid being questioned by Chenovniks he abandoned the grade. Nonetheless the occasional mujik he encountered confirmed his suspicion that something was brewing; his own kind were unfriendly, which was a bad sign. Because of it, he did not loiter and came to the north fork of the river and in sight of the tunnel shortly before dark. The settlement itself was out of sight round the shoulder of the bluff.

Unfortunately the river was too swift in the center to be frozen, and too deep to ford, so he turned downstream hoping to cross at the railroad bridge which was still under construction.

But in this he was disappointed for in the center the foot plank had been removed, making it impossible to go farther. While he was considering the matter he was joined by a timber cutter, who lost his temper royally when he saw the gap in the foot plank.

"How is a mujik to get drunk?" he demanded furiously. "Every night for a week some stinking Asiat tears up the board."

"Why do they do such a thing?" Peter asked.

"Hast thou been seven days dead, young idiot? The mujiks who worked by agreement at one end of the tunnel went on strike for higher pay. Naturally they killed an Asiat or two—not a great matter before God, but what has come of it? The contractors got together and forced Boris Evanovich to throw every Russian off the job. So there it is—more honest peasants thrown out in the taiga! And now the yellow weasels pull up this plank because they are afraid." He snapped his fingers. "Nonetheless we will fool them this once. Come with me!"

Half an hour later, Peter and his new friend came out of the standing timber carrying a heavy sapling between them. They swung it across the gap. It was a risky crossing but they made it, swinging like monkeys in mid-air. And on the other side Peter's new acquaintance left him in surly silence, as though suspicious even of his own kind.

It was quite dark now and Peter had difficulty in finding his way. He followed the grade to the portal of the tunnel nearest the bridge. Here coolies were at work by torchlight but they refused to answer his questions and sent insulting remarks after him as he turned away into the foot trail that climbed over the bluff.

He took the hint and asked nothing further of anyone, but poked about like a dog hunting its master, until over the lintel of a door he saw the shield and crossed horns of the service. Here, then, was headquarters, and if his saint was attending Boris Evanovich would be within.

Peasant fashion, he knocked and entered and closing the door stood immediately inside waiting to be noticed. But the office proved to be empty though voices came indistinctly from an inner room.

He was just wondering whether it would be permitted to cross the room and knock on the inner door, when quite without warning it opened and there was Orlof looking at him, with surprised recognition.

"Thee?"—It was scarcely more than a movement of the lips, while he looked quickly backward over his shoulder.

"Barin!"—Peter took an eager step forward. "I have come——"

He was stopped by a quick gesture of silence, as Boris Evanovich closed the door and crossed to him. He spoke under his breath. "Now, tell me quickly—why art thou here?"

Peter produced the Governor's letter and waited in silence while he read it. The letter was neither addressed nor signed:

"Be prepared for sudden developments. You are authorized to take any steps you see fit, even to reversing the official policy regarding coolies. Question the bearer as to the source of this communication."

Orlof put the letter away. "Who sent thee?" he asked.

"One was given the writing by the Governor, in the room where is to be seen the portrait of the Tsar. One was told to hurry, Barin. One has taken three days; it could not be done sooner."

"What else?"

"Such is the message, Barin. But also one has learned that at the back of the mischief is Tsing Feng! And, Barin"—Peter's voice dropped to a whisper—"the lousy Asiats prepare trouble which will be laid at the door of the mujiks."

Orlof's eyes had not left the boy's face. "Who told thee such a thing?"

Peter's gesture included all the taiga. "It is in the air, Barin."

The scar on Orlof's chin showed an irregular white line. "Stay here!" he ordered; and he went out.

Peter sighed patiently. He was tired and hungry and he desired unnumbered glasses of tea. Even so, one could rest. He moved toward the stove intending to sit down, but before he reached it he stopped dead and his mouth dropped open—for none other than Nicholai Denikin was standing in the inner doorway.

"Thee, Tovarish?——" Peter hardly recognized his own voice.

"None else, Peter! But one heard that thou wert arrested, with the letter."

Peter swallowed. His instinct was to lie, but here in this quiet room alone with this man whose eyes reminded him of a priest something as deep as his love for the taiga caused him to answer nothing less than the truth.

"Tovarish, one read the letter, and one carried it back to the Governor. . . ."

"God in heaven!"—Rage caused the words to rattle in Nicholai's throat. "What, then, of thine oath? Or art thou the dirtiest thing that lives—a government spy?"

Peter turned pale. He was angry too, angry enough to answer back fearlessly. "Who art thou to call one a spy? At the back of this business stands Tsing Feng—and there you have an enemy of Russia!"

Nicholai controlled himself with an effort. "An ignorant mujik such as thee, what dost thou know? It is thy service to obey. Now, thou wilt tell me what was in the letter."

Peter shook his head. "One has sworn not to speak of it."

"An oath to a Chenovnik counts nothing!" The eyes of the priest were on Peter again, but this time they stirred him differently.

"If that is so then an oath to such as thee, who takes money from Tsing Feng, is also nothing! And yet even so one has kept silent. . . ."

For a breathing space Nicholai said nothing at all. Then he put a hand on the boy's shoulder. "Thou art still a child, Petroushka, but he who has given his loyalty to the party must use even the enemies of Russia—is such a thing too difficult for thee to understand?"

Peter's voice was rebellious. "To flood the taiga with Asiats—to starve the peasants—to drive out Boris Evanovich . . . such things make only for trouble."

Nicholai sighed. "Until men are desperate the party

will not thrive—not until it is strong enough to kill those who dare resist."

All the confusion of the past months was reflected in Peter's eyes. "Then one does not belong to thy party, Nicholai, for such things are not according to God."

Nicholai's hand dropped to his side. "Were I to report thee, thou wouldst be killed."

Peter did not move. "And yet with it all one does not love Chenovniks . . . they are weasels who suck blood. . . ."

Nicholai sighed again. "In the end thou wilt be a revolutionary even as the rest of us; but one was a fool to send thee for that letter."

He stood a moment in deep thought. Had he, after all, been a fool? In the beginning, like Peter, he had called Tsing Feng an enemy, but the Chinaman's money and his proposal to flood the taiga with coolies had won him. Such a plan spelled endless trouble for officials, and for the peasants, rebellion. To force matters Tsing Feng proposed to destroy the tunnel and fasten the blame on the Russian workmen. But with all things in readiness he was still counseling patience, when the affair with the Governor's secretary had forced his hand. In the end, therefore, it had been well that Peter had been sent, for now within the hour the tunnel would be destroyed—after which martial law and the Governor's resignation. And then . . .

His attention swung back to the Governor. That white-haired old fox was clever, he made men loyal—such men as Boris Evanovich who ought to belong to the party; and such boys as Peter who were promising recruits. His

thoughts jerked again, this time to the present, and he roused himself and spoke incisively.

"Why art thou here?"

"To warn Boris Evanovich," Peter answered.

"Gospodi!" Nicholai was angry again. "Is there then no end to thy foolish interference? However, even thy beloved Governor himself could not prevent what is coming within the hour!" His voice took on a note of triumph—and prophecy. "It will teach thee the strength of those that fight to free Russia! Within the hour we set off an explosion that will be heard in Petersburg."

Explosion? . . .

Understanding came to Peter in a flash. The tunnel . . . dynamite! . . . The gap in the bridge . . . the insulting coolies. . . . So that was the way of it! He caught Nicholai by the arm.

"Quick!—Boris Evanovich! He has gone to prevent it . . . one warned him!"

In his desperation he wasted no time attempting to explain, and instinct drove him to appeal not to the revolutionary but to the man. "Dost thou understand?—He has gone to the tunnel. Thy sister is his woman. . . ."

For perhaps ten long seconds Nicholai stood still and Peter watched a struggle that he remembered to the end of his days. The fanatic fought with the man . . . and the man won. Boris Evanovich had saved his life in the old days—Boris Evanovich would marry his sister—one could perhaps save him without risk to the rest of the scheme. . . .

He pushed the boy out of the way and made for the door.

CHAPTER VIII

YOUNG RUSSIA

NICHOLAI'S departure was so sudden that Peter had difficulty in trailing him through the darkness and confusion of the streets; but in the end they came together to the tunnel entrance nearest to the camp.

At the moment when they reached the open cut and came in sight of the portal itself Boris Evanovich dropped down from the pathway that came over the bluff. He had been running and was out of breath, and he ignored them both while he studied the mob of coolies who were grouped round a smoky fire immediately in front of the entrance.

Peter's first glance in the same direction filled him with dread. These coolies were not the peace-loving Asiats of his past experience, whom any hishnik could rob. They were gesticulating violently and their low-pitched gutturals came to him like the ground swell of a threatening storm. His inclination was to bolt before the devil whom they served came out of the gaping black hole in the hill.

But he did not bolt. Nicholai was speaking and his first words caught his attention.

"Boris—come away! It is too late."

Boris Evanovich stood where he was. "It is not too late to tell thee that thou art a Russian who has sunk low enough to take orders from a Chinaman!"

Nicholai flushed under the insult. "Is any weapon too dirty to use in the cause of freedom?"

"Seemingly no man is too great a liar to belong to your party."

"Lying is sometimes a virtue when dealing with Chenovniks."

"There speaks the revolutionary!" Orlof retorted bitterly. "I have just now come over the bluff. Both portals are guarded by armed coolies, and they are not contractors' men. They have broken into the magazine and stolen dynamite, which they now carry into the tunnel. All this was known to you, yet you used my friendship to keep me in the office and so give them time."

Nicholai put his hand on Orlof's arm. "Boris—quarreling helps nothing. Think of Ekaterina and come away before it is too late!"

Orlof shook his arm free. "Tell thy sister I respect a revolutionary but not Tsing Feng's spy."

He turned abruptly toward the portal of the tunnel. But before he had gone two paces Peter was by his side.

"Barin—Barin!"

As the boy had stood listening to the two men his spirit had flashed back to that morning in the taiga when he had found Boris Evanovich seemingly dead—the morning when he had first crossed the path of the Asiat with long nails. And at that moment, in spite of his lifelong distrust of officials, in spite of his new loyalties to Nicholai and the party, it came to him that Boris Evanovich, and such as he, stood more truly for Russia than any whom he knew. Ne Ah Bo's joss stick came out of his clothes as though it had been a sword.

"My Barin—take it! These cholera-stricken Asiats know it to be the mark of Tsing Feng!"

Startled, Orlof fingered the joss stick while Peter stood by silent, content that his Barin would know what to do. But it was Nicholai's gesture of alarmed surprise that gave Orlof his cue.

He turned to the revolutionary. "I am armed—and thou wilt come with me! Thou shalt see me test the authority of thy master, Tsing Feng!"

Peter prepared to follow, but Orlof stopped him. "Go back to the office—it is an order. Do not wait here."

But Peter did not go. He stood looking after the two men who, each in his own degree, still commanded his loyalty.

He saw them come to the mob of coolies who guarded the portal, and he saw the joss stick held high in Orlof's hand. A few sharp words were spoken and the Asiats fell back. They waited with Oriental indifference while the two Russians entered the tunnel, and then, in a little while, came streaming back through the open cut where Peter stood.

They passed and the boy was alone.

For twenty minutes he waited. Then Boris Evanovich and Nicholai reappeared. Orlof carried a handful of time fuses which Peter knew had been made ready to explode a charge of dynamite. Such visible evidence that Tsing Feng had schemed to destroy the tunnel made the boy's hair crinkle on his scalp. Such an outrage would bring the army into the taiga! A surge of gladness went through him that he had trusted his Barin to understand, and that, insignificant as he was, he had done his

part. Though he had disobeyed orders in staying he went to Orlof quickly.

But Orlof's attention was with Nicholai. All the antagonism of half an hour ago seemed to have died out and Peter, sensitive to atmosphere, saw that these two friends who were enemies looked at each other with no shadow of hostility. It was Boris Evanovich who spoke.

"We have disagreed for twenty years, Nicholai—thy choice was revolution, mine was service under the Tsar, but even so I have no quarrel with thee as a man."

Nicholai sighed. "Why talk of it, Boris? We both wear the uniform, but we see Russia differently—I see her ultimately free."

Orlof touched the visor of his cap. "And while I wear the crossed horns of my service I stand for discipline. In the end thy party will be worse for Russia than the Tsars." He held up the joss stick. "That boy, Nicholai—by some trick of destiny—has saved my tunnel and with it a great many lives. Thy master, Tsing Feng, works only to bring Russia to her knees, a lesson which thou wilt learn too late."

The eyes that reminded Peter of a priest looked into his. "Ah, well—go with God, young one! Some day thou wilt be forced to choose between us; there is no other way under heaven."

"There is another way," Boris Evanovich answered quietly. "Education! That boy stands midway between us: Young Russia demanding schools. It is the better way, but it will not be taken in time."

Peter looked from one to the other, they seemed to be waiting for him to speak. All the confused thinking of the

past year rose up and claimed him. He rubbed his nose with the back of his hand. "What can such a one as me know?"

Neither man attempted an answer. . . . It was the cry that had echoed through the whole of their lives. But the man who wore the crossed horns on his cap nodded with complete understanding. He repeated Nicholai's words:

"Go with God, young one!"

There came a day, two weeks later, when Peter cooled his heels in the corridor outside His Excellency's door. All the afternoon Stenka had stood guard while Boris Evanovich and many of the contractors on the new line held conference within.

The Governor himself took little part in the debate. He had given his ultimatum . . . the taiga must be cleared of coolies. Thereafter, he sat for the most part silent while Boris Evanovich and the contractors fought over details.

When all was finished and the room was again empty he sent for the samovar. Presently, as Stenka poured his second glass of tea, he seemed to remember something.

"Bring that boy to me," he said, "and leave us alone!"

Thus, for the second time in his life, Peter was admitted into the presence of the great one and came to a halt four feet from his chair.

The Governor looked him over without smiling. "Thou hast been the cause of much trouble, young man."

"Yes, Excellency."

"I permit thee to go to school, and in a little while thou hast become a recruit of the revolutionary party."

"Yes, Excellency."

"Why didst thou do such a thing?"

"One does not love Chenovniks, Excellency."

"Because one killed thy father?"

"No, Excellency!—since we talked of it one has understood a little. . . ."

"Then why?——"

"Chenovniks are like hishniks, Barin, they steal; and they take bribes; and they think only of themselves."

"I see. And thy new friends the revolutionaries—of whom do they think?"

Peter took a moment to consider. "One has listened to their talk . . . they wish to make Russia free."

"And does Russia's freedom claim thy loyalty?"

The boy looked troubled. "How can one say, Excellency? In a way they, also, are like hishniks for when they say freedom they think only of the party."

The Governor crossed his knees and leaned back in his chair; it seemed to make him less of a great one. "And thou—what dost thou think, Peter?"

Peter's eyes grew sultry with feeling. "Only one knows that one's service is to Boris Evanovich, and to thee! And to Him——" he indicated the portrait on the wall.

"H'm! Yes?—And perhaps a little also to this Nicholai Denikin—is it not so?"

Peter moved uncomfortably. "What is one to say? He has eyes that remind one of a priest."

The Governor said nothing for a space. Then he uncrossed his legs and sat up, and with his two hands rest-

ing firmly on the arms of his chair he spoke as though he expected to be obeyed.

"It is to be remembered that thou hast done me a service. It is also to be remembered that thou art a hishnik's son who, at thy age, can know very little. Now, this is my order. To-morrow thou wilt go back to school. Until thou art finished thou wilt live in my kitchen, for I do not choose that thou shalt be influenced by revolutionaries until thou art old enough to think for thyself. In a year or so thou wilt be taken by the army, and in the army thou wilt learn discipline. That will be a good thing."

"Yes, Excellency."

He was silent for so long that Peter dared a question. "Is it a good thing, Barin, that the army takes everyone?"

The Governor leaned back in his chair again. He had ceased for the moment to be one who expected to be obeyed. "Perhaps I am too old to answer that question wisely. Perhaps thou art too young to understand. When thou art discharged if I am in Chita we will talk of it again."

"Is it an order, Excellency?"

The Governor stood up. "No, Peter, it is not an order, but one will be curious to learn what thou hast done with thy education. Now, go!"

As the door closed the head of the Shustof family, which for generations had been famous for its loyalty to its Tsars, addressed a remark to the portrait on the wall.

"If during my lifetime we had educated a million

such, what—one wonders—would have happened to Russia! . . ."

Peter went straight to His Excellency's kitchen, and because a great load had been lifted from his heart, on the first opportunity he slipped away and went in search of Feenga. He had not seen her since the night he had carried the Secretary's message to Nicholai.

She was stirring something in a bowl at the end of the table when he opened the door. She dropped her spoon with a clatter and came toward him, only however to stop in the middle of the floor with her chin raised and both hands aggressively on her hips.

"Well!—Now glory be to my saint if it is not our little Peter himself!"

Peter admitted it with a grin. "Noo, Feenga! one has come back."

She continued to survey him with what appeared to be calm disdain. "Little fool! An ignorant one such as thee . . ."

Peter had come hot-foot to tell her a number of things, but finding her in such a mood it was difficult to begin and to avoid further questions he took her by both arms and kissed her awkwardly on the cheek.

It produced no effect whatsoever; she went straight on. "Pretending thou art a grown man . . . calling thyself a revolutionary! . . . getting thyself arrested!"

Peter got hold of her again, but this time he shook her. "Shut thy mouth, and when I am ready I will tell thee whatever I choose! Now, what did they do to thee, and Ekaterina?"

Feenga backed away until she came to the table and with a finger tucked into the corner of her mouth she looked with secret exultation at this Peter whom she had roused. She had been cold with fear when the police had held her for questioning; and hot with fury when Peter had kept silent for so long. What was the use of learning to read?—what was the use of anything if they could not share?—But with Peter scowling . . . ready, she hoped, to shake her again . . . Her heart sang! . . .

"Gospodi! Petroushka, thy beard is growing."

"Chort! Thou hast said it before." He flung away in disgust.

With leisurely fingers Feenga smoothed her apron ready for a comfortable chat.

"They came here at midnight, a policeman and the one with blue eyes. That one is a high Chenovnik, and he talked to Ekaterina about Nicholai, but she would say nothing; and then he asked me questions about thee."

Peter had forgotten he was annoyed. "And thou told him nothing?"

"Certainly one lied to a Chenovnik—but already he knew of thy work at the Sign of the Dancing Girl; and other secrets that thou hast guarded with thy life."

"What secrets?" Peter demanded.

Feenga's manner was patient. "Thy friendship for the party!"

"And what didst thou say?"

She went back to her bowl and renewed operations with the spoon. "One told him of Boris Evanovich and thy trust. One said one had known thee always. And that one had been beaten because of thee!"

Peter showed impatience. "Between men such things are not a great matter."

Feenga concerned herself with the contents of her bowl. "In the morning they took us to thy Governor, that old one with white hair. He sat in a great chair and talked to Ekaterina, without anger, but what he said I could not hear for I stood close to the door. When it was finished he called me to him and asked of the Foreigner's baby." The spoon beat the contents of the bowl with greater energy. "Then one mentioned that thou hadst come to Nicholai's kitchen to give me schooling, therefore it was my fault that thou hadst joined the party."

"It was not thy fault, stupid one!" Peter interrupted.

"Noo—" Feenga put down the spoon—"How could one tell a great one that thou wert jealous of Grescha?"

Peter made an impatient noise. "How can one talk to a girl?"

But nonetheless he did talk. Now that so much was known, for the first time he felt at liberty to speak freely to one of his own kind; and Feenga, the contents of her bowl neglected, sat with her chin in her hands listening, and her eyes showed that she understood. He talked of the greatness of his love for the taiga—the depth of his distrust of officials—his instinctive loyalty to such men as Boris Evanovich and the Governor—his acceptance of Nicholai as a true man. And he told her of the thieving and corruption on the railroad; and of the story of the coolies, and of Tsing Feng; until little by little he came to the night at the tunnel when Boris Evanovich and Nicholai had faced each other—those two enemies who were friends.

One thing only he withheld, the Governor's proposed resignation. That was his trust.

And through it all ran the tangled thread of his confusion: a confusion which was destined to beset all those of his generation who set themselves to think. Whether it were best to be patient like the Governor, who believed in education . . . or restless like Nicholai, who would use even an enemy if by so doing he could free Russia.

Feenga greeted the end of the story with a long sigh. "Noo, Petroushka . . . There it is! . . . What does anyone know?"

And so they left it; and presently Peter put on his cap and they went out together.

On the porch they looked into the window of the living room and saw Boris Evanovich and Ekaterina talking earnestly together. Feenga snuggled against Peter's arm. "Now that Nicholai has gone he will take her for his woman!" she whispered. Peter made a noise through his teeth.

They walked slowly on across the yard, each thinking their own thoughts. Outside the open gateway Peter stopped.

"In about a year one will be taken for the army. What wilt thou do, Feenga?"

There was certainty in Feenga's voice. "One will wait for thee to come back, Petroushka."

"Perhaps one will come back a revolutionary!"

"It will be all one," she answered a little scornfully.

"Perhaps one will come back a Chenovnik!"

"Byedda!—One hopes thy saint is not listening to such foolishness." And then, suddenly serious, she lifted her

head. "In the beginning thou wert a hishnik's son, and I a herder of pigs, but one has been taught to read—what comes out of such a thing, who shall say?"

Peter's head went up also. "And if I should want thee for my woman?"

With a quick touch of mischief she moved closer. "Ah, my Petroushka—must one cross one's self three times?"

Peter caught the hand that began to make a sign in the air. "Thou wilt kiss me three times, little idiot! And presently thou wilt tell Grescha to mind his own affairs. . . ."

Feenga's head leaned back against the fence. Her handkerchief had fallen back and the masses of her hair, soft and shiny as Anna Mihaelovna's, brushed against the mark of the Traveler on the gatepost. It was still visible, but for once Peter failed to see it.

"If I kiss thee three times thou wilt be my woman!" he said, in all seriousness.

Feenga sighed with deep content.

GLOSSARY

Baba. An old woman.
Barin. A gentleman; nobleman. *Colloq.:* Chief; boss.
Byedda. *Lit.:* Ill-luck. *Colloq.:* too bad!
Chenovnik. A bureaucrat. Colloquially used for any official.
Chort. Devil. *Colloq.:* The deuce!
Durak. Fool; silly.
Dyadya. Uncle.
Grescha. Diminutive of Gregory.
Gospodi. God; Lord.
Hishnik. A robber; gold thief.
Icon. An image; holy picture.
Kinjal. A dagger.
Kopek. A small Russian coin worth about half a cent.
Latok. A wooden dish used for panning gold.
Mujik. A clodhopper; common fellow.
Noo. Come! Now then! Well!
Petroushka. Diminutive for Peter.
Pogani. Unclean; impure; dirty.
Rabchick. Timber grouse.
Rouble. A Russian coin worth about fifty cents.
Staroushka. Old woman.
Samovar. An urn used for making tea. *Lit.:* Self-boiler.
Stenka. Diminutive for *Stepan.*
Taiga. Virgin forest.

Tf-oo-ee. Faugh! Pshaw!
Tovarish. Comrade.
Tundra. Swamp.
Verst. A measure of distance; about two-thirds of an English mile.
Von. Out! Away! Get out!
Vot tebia na!. What do you know about that!
Russian proverb: Bez zamaska ne piyedit. Without hair oil [bribery] no one goes.

THE END

EUROPE
SIBERIA
CHINA
INDIA
AFRICA
INDIAN OCEAN
PACIFIC OCEAN
THIS IS ALL TAIGA -
AND MANY HILLS
WHITE MOUNTAIN
WHERE THE FOREIGNER LIVED
CLOUDY PEAK
DAVENDA R.
SHILKA R.
GORBITZA R.
WHITE RIVER
GORBITZA
PETER WAS BORN HERE
KARA
OF EVIL MEMORY
STRETENSK
NERCHINSK
SHILKA RIVER
WHERE THE GOVERNOR WALKED THE FLOOR
CHITA
TO HARBIN
CHINESE EASTERN RAILWAY

EW LINE
WITH
HNIKS
THIS IS PARTLY
FARMING LAND
AMUR R.
COUNTRY LITTLE HILLS
HIGH MOUNTAINS
ZEYA R.
WHERE THE WILD
HOONG HOOZA LIVE
AMUR R.
MANCHURIA
BLAGOVESCHENSK
CARAVAN ROUTE
TO HARBIN
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